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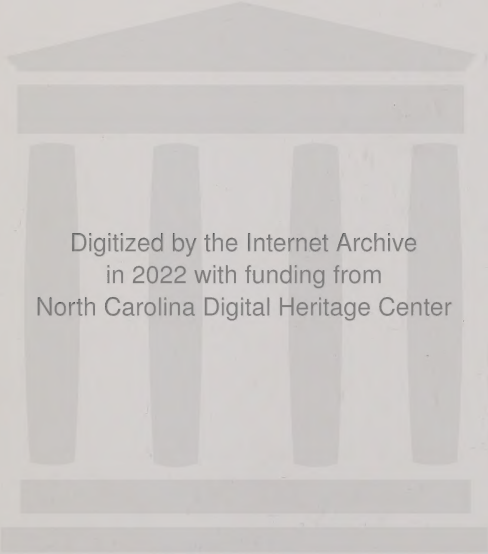
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THE IMMORTAL NICK ARRINGTON

By

GLENN H. TODD



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THE
IMMORTAL
NICK
ARRINGTON

by

GLENN H. TODD

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my darling wife, Ruth Mildred and to the courageous men and women everywhere, who through the years, during peace and war; years of adversity and prosperity; and in spite of foolish and unjust laws, have kept the ancient and honorable sport of cocking alive and flourishing in every State of the U. S. and nearly every civilized nation on the globe.

*Glenn H. Todd
Author*

Preface

THE IMMORTAL NICK ARRINGTON

This is not a work of fiction. The author has been interested, since boyhood days, in the many legends and life of this wonderful man. He has spent years of research to gather the facts written in this book. The more he learned, the more fascinated he became.

It is difficult to understand why this true story of such a great and colorful American would lay dormant for so many years. The author has made such a thorough research of this work that even the detailed descriptive parts are exact and true, and so are all the characters mentioned.

He has visited old grave yards and crumbling old mansions. Contacted relatives, which are now scattered over the U. S. Interviewed historians and members of Historical Societies. Viewed the ancient land grants given to the Arringtons which had the seal and signature of the English King. Searched through old files, papers, documents, deeds, wills, and abstracts of titles. Read nearly a trunk full of old letters found in the attic of the old Arrington mansion. Looked at antiques and paintings which came from the old mansion.

He has delved deeply in history, especially the history of the American Arringtons who came from England. He studied many ancient game fowl journals which gave an exact and full account of the many sporting events, plus other historical facts of this grand gentleman and his family.

The author dislikes fiction of any kind and has been very careful to write only that which he knew to be facts;

and only facts are needed; for this man's life was more colorful than any fiction.

Nicholas Williams Arrington was born December 25th, 1806 a descendant of the English nobility. After the death of his father and older brother he inherited a vast amount of wealth in property, land, money, and slaves.

He was appointed to the office of Chief Deputy Sheriff of Nash County, North Carolina before he was 21 years old. While in this office he made an excellent record for apprehending and bringing criminals to justice, but his main interest next to his wife and children was game fowl.

He was from a very distinguished family; a fine peace officer; soldier, and Master of The Cedars, one of the largest cotton and tobacco plantations in the South, and he was very wealthy. But for all this; he was probably known best for his invincible gamecocks which he fought by the hundreds each year. He was never defeated in a cocking main and was without doubt, the greatest cockfighter that ever lived. He met and defeated many of the best cockers living in his time.

In all probability Nick Arrington fought more cocks than any Oriental Potentate or Maharaja ever fought. He had both wealth and leisure to follow what was dearest to his heart and had no regard for distance, time or money, when a cockfight was over the horizon. He feared no one in the cockpit and would travel very long distances to meet his opponents. He was sometimes spoken of as, "The Traveling Cocker."

NICK ARRINGTON WAS ALL THAT MOST MEN DREAM
OF, AND WOULD LIKE TO BE

John Black at Stoney Creek

The youthful Deputy Sheriff pulled the black stallion to a halt and dismounted. It was high noon and hot weather for the latter part of April. He had been trailing the criminals since early morn, after the overseer of the Cooper plantation near Hilliardston rode to his place, The Cedars, and reported to him, the missing team of beautiful carriage horses from the Cooper stables. The matching team of snow white horses had been a wedding gift from Mr. Cooper to his daughter and son-in-law. The young couple were staying at the Cooper plantation while their house was being built about three miles away.

The Deputy studied the hoof tracks in the sandy road; this back road along Stoney creek was seldom used and made tracking easy. The tracks were fresh and very plain but seemed to end here as though the group had left the road and had gone into the surrounding woods. "Whe-e-e-e-e-e-e," the sound of a horse's whinny came from the direction of Stoney Creek very near. The Deputy pulled on the reins and spoke softly to the stallion, fearing he would answer the whinny. The black stallion remained quiet and the Deputy tied him to a sapling and drew his rifle from the scabbard on the side of the animal. Cautiously he walked in the direction of Stoney Creek.

Soon he could hear voices and he moved as stealthily as an Indian in that direction. Peering through the thick foliage which grew along the creek, he could see a small clearing on the bank of the stream. There were three men in the clearing; a pack horse loaded with camp provisions, and five other horses.

The large man doing most of the talking was smearing something black on one of the stolen white horses. The Deputy supposed this one to be the leader of the trio as he studied them carefully and listened to their conversation. Could this be John Black? he thought. He had never seen John Black or his henchmen, but had heard much about them. John Black was suspected of being guilty of many crimes in several states, but lack of sufficient evidence had always kept him from being convicted.

The white horse snorted disapprovingly of the black greasy substance being brushed on its snow white coat. The man applying it spoke, "This one is finished, how does it look, Gypsy?"

Gypsy answered, "I would almost believe it natural, if I hadn't seen you do it." The snow white animal now appeared to be a black and white spotted horse and only a very close examination would reveal the deception.

The talkative man started to work on the other white horse tied nearby and continued to talk. "We

will git two more good hosses near Nashville before we start to Virginny. Ole man Drake has some fine hosses too. The Drake place ain't fur from where we got these two white hosses at."

"Yea, I seen the Drake hosses, and they looked good to me too," Gypsy agreed with the leader.

"You boys got to wash and clean these white hosses after we git to Virginny, ain't right fur me to do it all," the talkative one said.

The Deputy examined the pistol at his side; replaced it in the holster, and stealthily moved to within a few feet of the trio. He then pointed his rifle at them and stepped into the clearing in plain view of the horse thieves. "Don't move if you want to stay alive," he ordered. The outlaws looked very surprised to learn that anyone could get so near them, without them knowing it. They knew there was not a chance to escape; at this close range some of them were sure to be killed. Even a suspicious move from any of them would be dangerous. After a pause to get over his shock, the leader spoke, "You got us Sheriff, we don't want to be killed. Ain't you Nick Arrington, the Chief Deputy in Nash county?" "That is right and you are John Black, I believe," answered the Deputy. "Yes, that is right, Sheriff," replied the

leader of the trio. Nick looked at the short fat man whom John Black had addressed as Gypsy. "What is your name?" Nick asked. "Jim Bart, but everybody calls me Gypsy 'cause the gypsies raised me when I was a kid," the man answered. Looking at the tall man with red hair, Nick asked, "And who are you?" "Red Ericson, right name is Ivan but most folks call me Red," the man answered. "You men turn around and raise your hands," Nick ordered. The thieves turned their backs to Nick and raised their hands. Nick drew his pistol; laid the rifle down, and felt them over good for concealed weapons with one hand, while he held the pistol with the other hand.

He took a long blade knife from Gypsy, and a short gun from Black. Ericson was unarmed except for a saddle gun on the side of his mount. He then removed the two pair of handcuffs attached to his belt and snapped them on Black and Gypsy. "Stand still!" he ordered the prisoners, while he thought of some way to secure Ericson. With the knife he had taken from Gypsy he cut about four feet of rope from what the pack horse was carrying, keeping his eyes on the prisoners all the time. He put a slip noose in one end of the rope to draw the prisoner's wrists together, and with this section of rope, Nick securely tied the wrists of Ericson. The thieves did not know the supply of rope they carried for stolen horse leads would be used on one of them.

He then walked the men and horses in front of him to where his stallion was hitched, and after removing the long saddle guns from their horses, he ordered the outlaws to "Mount up!"

"You men ride in front slowly!" he ordered. "And don't forget I will be right behind with my gun on you all, and I don't miss often."

Nick was thankful they were not far from Nashville, the county seat of Nash county, North Carolina. The white horses would be led to Nashville and later be returned to the Cooper stables. The outlaws rode slowly in front as Nick had ordered and each was leading a horse; one was leading the pack horse.

The Chief Deputy had a way with prisoners and usually learned more from them, than most law officers could. He sometimes appealed to their vanity. "You men are smart and have gone a long time without getting caught. You always steal good horses too; shows you all must be good horsemen and know a lot about horses. How did you operate so long without getting caught?"

John Black was flattered with these remarks from Nick and he answered proudly, "I reckon we are good hossmen, Sheriff, we been at this game fur a good while. We got a little place up in Virginny in the hills, where we take all the hosses first. I do most of

the thinking for the boys. We travel at night most of the time till we git to Virginny, unless we change the looks of the hosses a lot, like we did these. When we do that, we travel in daytime, but we always stay on the back roads in this State. We sell the hosses up in Virginny and Maryland." "Did you boys rob and kill the two men carrying gold from the Portis mine to be expressed to the mint?" asked Nick. "No Sir, Sheriff, we ain't guilty of any killing," Black quickly replied. "But you did steal horses from "Belford" the Sills plantation, didn't you?" "Yes, we took some hosses from the Sills place, but we ain't killed or robbed nobody from the Portis gold mine," Black answered.

The confession of stealing the Sills horses surprised Nick. "Out West you boys would be hung without much of a trial." There was very little said for the balance of the trip to Nashville, the county seat. The prisoners seemed to be gloomy at the thought of going to jail. Nick instructed the prisoners to ride to the back of the jail and avoid going down the main street. He hitched the horses to the hitching rail at the rear of the jail; ordered the three prisoners to dismount and marched them inside. After locking them up, he removed the rope from Ericson's wrists and the handcuffs from Black and Gypsy.

The elderly turnkey looked surprised when Nick wrote the name of each prisoner on the jail register;

then added, charged with horse stealing; not to be released on bond. The turnkey asked, "How did you take John Black, Mr. Arrington?" Nick laughed, and answered, "I brought you in a notorious guest this time, I will explain later. Take care of those three, I still think they are guilty of killing the Portis mine guards, but they won't admit it. I want to talk to each one alone sometime soon. They won't be with you long, it is just three days until Superior Court will be held. Tell the High Sheriff not to release these men under any circumstances; horse stealing is a serious felony and they are not supposed to get out on bail." The jailer answered, "Alright Mr. Arrington."

The High Sheriff had always given Nick a free hand in the Sheriff Department. He depended on Nick for almost all the policing in Nash county and never disputed his Chief Deputy about anything. Nick made most of the arrests and some of the people in Nash county thought of him as the High Sheriff, because he was always active in any business of the Sheriff Department.

The aging High Sheriff seldom left the town of Nashville and looked to Nick to shoulder all matters of importance which arose. He had appointed the young man to this office in his 20th year, the same year Nick had married. He admired the courage of the young Deputy and his activity and interest in

bringing criminals to justice. Nick's grandfather, Arthur Arrington, had served as the first Sheriff of Nash county, even before the court house and jail were built in Nashville. Arthur Arrington used a stone building on his plantation for a jail until Nashville got a court house and jail.

Arthur Arrington, Matthew Drake, Edward Clinch, Nathan Boddie, and Duncan Lamon were the five men empowered to select a site for the first Court House, jail, and other county buildings to be erected in Nash County.

After leaving the jail, Nick led the two stolen horses across the street to the livery stable. "Good evening Mr. Arrington," said the attendant. "Good evening, Steve," said Nick.

"Take care of these two horses, until Mr. Cooper near Hilliardston can get them or send after them. You know the Coopers don't you?" "Yes Sir, I know the Coopers, Mr. Arrington," Steve replied.

This business attended to, Nick then walked down the street to eat and talk with his friend, Mr. James Thomas who owned and operated the hotel in Nashville. Mr. Micajah Thomas had built the hotel, and the business had passed on down to James Thomas, his grandson. The hotel was one of the oldest buildings in Nashville.

Mr. Thomas greeted Nick as soon as he entered. Nick answered, "How are you today, Mr. Thomas? Can you do anything for a hungry man?"

"I suppose we can take care of that, Mr. Arrington, what would it be?"

Nick ordered a meal, and Mr. Thomas sat down at the same table for a friendly talk. Although he was elated, Nick modestly refrained from mentioning the capture of John Black and his henchmen. He knew, news of that would spread fast enough.

He liked being Chief Deputy, for he enjoyed bringing in criminals such as John Black. The salary he did not need or care for, and very often he paid some of the expenses of his office from his own pocket. He enjoyed his meal at the hotel and after finishing his conversation with Mr. Thomas, he walked back to the jail to speak to the turnkey again.

Nick entered the jail and said to the jailer, "Mr. Fisher, I will be back before Superior Court is held, I want to question the prisoners again. Will you lead the prisoner's horses over to the livery stable and tell Steve to take care of them for a few days? I don't know yet what we will do with them, they are probably stolen horses too." "Yes, I will take them over there, Mr. Arrington," answered the turnkey.

Nick made his exit from the jail by the back door; unhitched his black stallion and led him to the watering place nearby. The animal drank thirstily and

when he had drunk his fill, Nick mounted and headed for "The Cedars", his plantation near Hilliardston, ten miles away. Hilliardston got its name from Isaac Hilliard who opened the first general merchandise store in the little trading center.

The Cedars

Nick sat his horse very erect, and no one would think from observation, that both horse and rider were tired as they left the road and turned into the avenue of tall, stately cedars which led up to the large palatial white mansion at the top of the gradually rising terrain. The black stallion knowingly quickened his steps, desiring to end the day's riding and reach food and rest. The surrounding cedars made the air delightfully fragrant and refreshing.

He could see glimpses of light through the trees and knew they would be looking for him. When the front of the house was in full view, it seemed that almost all of the lamps had been lit.

The sound of the stallion's hoofs was now audible to those on the front porch. A negro stable boy stood near the front porch steps as Nick rode up. He dismounted and said to the boy, "Give him a good rub down before you feed and water, and give him a good measure of oats too." "Yas suh, Massa Nick," the stable boy replied.

Aunt Basil was first to speak, "The Missus shore been worried bout you, Massa Nick, I reckon you am hungry too,"

"No," answered Nick, "I had a big meal at Nashville, just bring me some cool buttermilk." Nick then kissed his wife Mary, and asked, "How are the children?"

"They are alright," answered his wife.

Nick sat down to rest on the front porch. Aunt Basil returned with a pitcher of buttermilk. "Shore ought to be cool, Massa Nick, jis come from de spring house." Nick understood why it took so long for Aunt Basil to bring the milk; one of the darkies had gone to the spring house after a crock jar of cool milk. He drank two glasses of the buttermilk and lit a long slender cigar. He enjoyed a cigar at the close of the day before retiring.

The fragrant evergreen trees smelled pleasant in the cool night breeze; Nick liked The Cedars, he was born here on Christmas Day, 1806. His grandfather, Arthur Arrington, had built The Cedars in 1747. Nick had inherited The Cedars and a vast amount of property, land, negroes, and money after the death of his father and brother. He had never seen all of his holdings; some of his land was in Virginia and one large tract was in the adjoining county of Edgecombe nearby, and some of his property was way down in Georgia. All of his land would total over a hundred thousand acres.

Nick valued the Nash County land more than the other; his father and grandfather had cleared the

large tracts and put them under cultivation. They had worked many negro slaves to fell the huge trees. After the trees were cut down, there would be "log rollings" when the logs would be rolled together and burned to make the fields suitable for cultivation. The result of this clearing made The Cedars one of the largest cotton and tobacco producing plantations in the South. Cotton was the principal crop but the Aringtons had learned from their relatives in Virginia that tobacco was profitable and were probably the first families in Nash county to cultivate it. The wheat crop grown at The Cedars, ranked third place in size or quantity.

All who viewed the large imposing white mansion surrounded by many beautiful cedars, were impressed with its magnificence and grandeur. Both the front and side porches had balcony porches over them. The porches were supported by large fluted white columns; the balcony porches were trimmed and ornamented with exquisite leaf design wrought iron, made in Europe. The wide balcony porches could be entered from any of the spacious, high ceiling bedrooms upstairs. The great house had two winding stairways; one of the stairways led down to the back portion of the house; the other came down to the front rooms. All windows had green blinds with rows of shutters which could be opened and shut by a handle in the center of each row. The timber and

material used to build this impressive structure had been carefully selected for quality, endurance and beauty.

Every room had a wood burning fireplace with mantels of imported polished marble. Fine wood paneling covered about half of the walls, the upper half above this wainscoting was plaster work painted in various shades of blue, old rose, pale green, yellow, and pink; no two rooms were alike. The winding stairways and side panels of the mantels were all hand carved by the patient work of artisan negroes. All rooms were large with high ceilings, and the large dining room had so many windows, it appeared to be made almost entirely of glass.

The beautiful Arrington home was filled with expensive, rare furnishings; much of it had been imported from England. Silverware made by famous English silversmiths, cut glassware, and fine China gleamed from the Cherry Wood cabinets in the dining room. Beautiful oil lamps made from brass and fancy tinted glass adorned each room. Fine oil burning crystal chandeliers imported from France hung in the downstairs rooms, and on the bedroom walls upstairs were numerous imported tapestries and large mirrors with ornate gilded frames.

The parlor was very elaborate and colorful, for this room was where they conversed with the most honored and distinguished guests. The furniture here

was made of rosewood and upholstered in brilliant colored plush; a massive, ornate, marble top table was placed in the center of the room and gayly decorated oil lamps were lit at night. In the halls hung life size portrait paintings done in oils and framed in heavy gilded gold leaf frames. Two of the paintings were done at The Cedars, the painter lived as a guest at the Arrington home while working on the portraits.

Many notables had been guests at the great house. Visitors and relatives from Virginia and Georgia sometimes spent several months at The Cedars. Sportsmen had always been shown a hospitality which knew no bounds, for Nick's father and grandfather were ardent sporting gentlemen. The conversations in the gayly furnished parlor usually turned to gamecocks, fast horses, or fox hounds. More often it would be gamecocks, for this topic interested the master of The Cedars most.

Some of the guests had been of the English nobility, for the Arringtons came from the English nobility and their vast land holdings were land grants direct from the English King. Lord Fairfax from Virginia, an ardent cockfighter, and close friend of George Washington, had enjoyed the hospitality of The Cedars. Thomas Jefferson, the third President of the U. S. had visited The Cedars shortly before he died at his home, "Monticello" where he bred and fought his Coal Black strain of gamecocks.

During the Revolution, Lafayette and Commander-in-Chief George Washington had called at The Cedars to talk with General Arthur Arrington, Nick's grandfather. General Arthur Arrington was head of the Quarter Master Corps and Colonial records show that Nash County furnished large amounts of supplies to the Continental troops. General Arthur Arrington also helped defeat the British in a hot skirmish near the Drake plantation home about six miles from The Cedars. Young Andrew Jackson admired the Arringtons, and had visited The Cedars several times while practicing law.

The Cedars was more than a large cotton and tobacco producing center; it was like a village which seemed at times to be independent from any outside influence and authority, although this was not a fact, for daily the mail was sent after to the Post Office in Hilliardston about two and a half miles away. Regular trips to Nashville and nearby towns were made for supplies and various commodities not produced or made on the plantation. The grounds about the big house and outlying buildings were covered with a growth of fine cedars. The long rows of numerous slave cabins were built among the cedars, and so were the large barns, horse stables, still house, carriage house, spring house, smoke house, and other buildings. Even the pasture land adjoining the barns, and stables, had many tall cedars growing there. The long

driveway from the front entrance down to the main road had cedars on both sides.

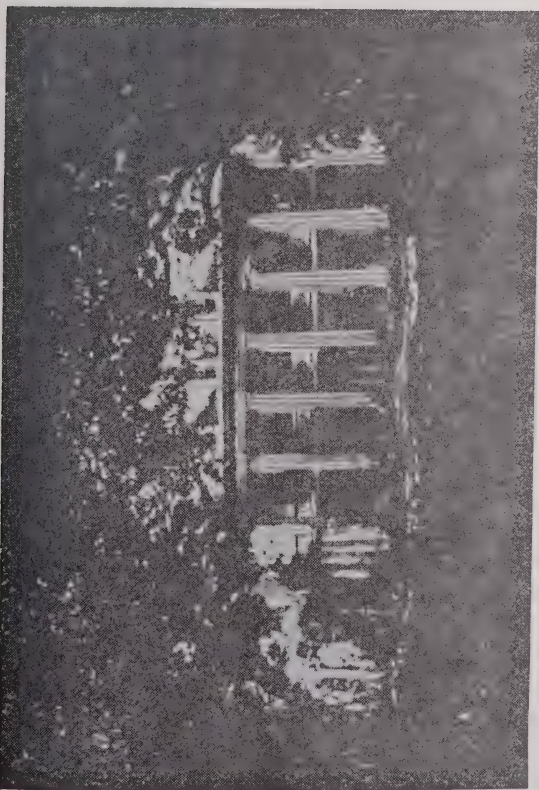
A winding, sandy, back road stretched from the rear of The Cedars mansion to Hilliardston, and beyond the little trading center were Nick's three cotton-gins, used in the Fall for separating the seeds from the cotton, and then pressing the cotton into bales, to be shipped to the textile mills of the world. On each side of this road was a long string of Nick's gamecock pens. These pens were very unique, for they served as a rail fence and cock pens combined. Every other point of the zigzag rail fence had been made into a triangle shaped pen, by stacking rails up on the open side and over the top of the triangle. As soon as the young stags began fighting they were placed in these separate pens until an open, free range walk, away from other roosters could be found for each of them. Nick did not believe in pen walks for raising fine healthy, fighting cocks.

The cock pens were not the only unique thing about The Cedars. Each morning, except Sunday and holidays, the overseer at the plantation would ring a huge solid silver bell to assemble the darkies for work. On Sunday, one of the negroes who preached and conducted services for the other darkies, would ring the silver bell. Nick had personally supervised the casting of the bell at the foundry. Over four bushel measures of silver coins were used to cast the bell. Some

said its soft beautiful tone could be heard in Hilliardston. The solid coin silver bell of The Cedars was widely known and talked about.

A wind mill pumped water to a huge wooden tank placed on a high scaffold. The elevation of the large tank caused the water to flow out of faucets when they were turned on in the mansion.

The Cedars and those who owned the property were held in deep respect and awe for this was one of the largest and wealthiest plantations in the South. Even the slaves were proud of The Cedars and their master, and were happy to be known as an Arrington negro of The Cedars.



THE CEDARS BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR

This photo was taken from an old ferrotype photograph, commonly known as a tintype picture, and was owned by Nick Collins, a grandson of Nick Arrington

Master of the Cedars

The news of John Black and his henchmen being caught at Stoney Creek, spread rapidly over the county. This was the main topic at all the general merchandise stores, livery stables, and taverns. The innkeeper at the White House Tavern near the Portis Gold Mine remarked, "I don't know how Mr. Arrington could take those three to Nashville as desperate as they were. I thought it would take a large posse to take John Black to jail. The Deputy must be as game as those fighting cocks he raises. I could never tackle three like that alone. Nearly everybody thinks they were the men who robbed and killed the two fellows from the mine." This exciting talk could be heard wherever people gathered for conversation.

Nick returned to Nashville before the day of the trial, but was unsuccessful in getting a confession of robbery and murder from the prisoners. The Court room was filled to capacity at the trial and the Superior Court judge was much more lenient on horse stealing than many of those present had expected. John Black was sentenced to ten years and his two accomplices were sentenced to five years each. As soon as the trial was over, Nick started for The Cedars, satisfied that this trio of criminals would not give trouble again soon.

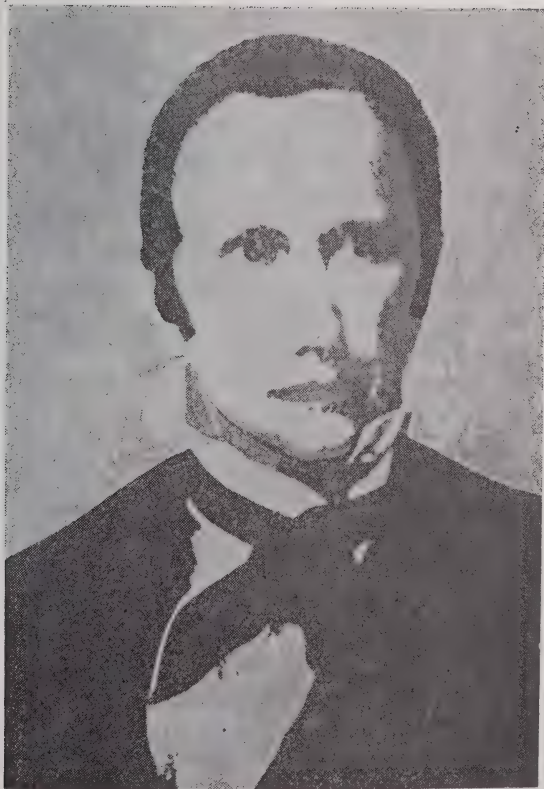
A stranger who was not well acquainted with Nick would probably think that he was selfish, arrogant, and spoiled by wealth. Nick had the attitude of a man seldom disputed, and moved with lordly ease and grace, like a person entirely free, never crossed, accustomed to being obeyed and wielding much influence. He was six feet and three inches in height and his posture was very erect. His face was handsome with kind gray eyes, and he had the body of an athlete, lean and muscular, with not an ounce of excess fat. Nick's lordly air sometimes caused strangers to misunderstand him. True he did have all that money would buy, and usually had had his way since he was a child; he not only managed his plantations with absolute, unquestionable authority, but also had much influence in Eastern North Carolina; yet he was not spoiled or overbearing.

All of the Arringtons were noted for their generosity and Nick was no exception. There were many who said, "The Arringtons don't know the value of money." Nick was kind, considerate, unselfish, and very generous. His hospitality knew no bounds to those he liked. Guests described him as a most gracious host who wanted to see everyone happy and comfortable about him. He was always ready to help anyone who needed it.

Nick was not a flashy or foppish dresser as many of the planters and sports were. He dressed well, and

wore clothes of good material, but seldom wore jewelry or such frills as lace cuffs. Usually the only ornamental part of his attire, would be a black bow tie. Wherever he went, his handsome face and tall, lean figure, attracted much attention. Those who knew him, looked upon him with deep admiration and respect. Softly, and in awe, someone would always say when he walked down the street. "There is Mr. Arrington, Master of The Cedars."

Some admired him for his many successful feats in cocking, or because he was from a very distinguished family; while others thought of him as Sheriff Arrington, a fine peace officer who had apprehended numerous criminals. Nick was often mistaken for a Pastor by strangers; due to his dignified bearing, his sedate and elegant manners, and stately erect walk.



NICHOLAS WILLIAMS ARRINGTON

This photo was taken from an oil painting of
"The Old Master" Cocker



The Halifax Grey

With the trial of John Black over, Nick resumed his interest in the coming hack fights scheduled to be fought in Halifax county, which adjoined Nash county. Nick had put up thirty-six of his best birds to be trained and conditioned for these hacks. In England "hacks" were sometimes called "Bye Battles" meaning, the cocks not selected to be fought in mains. In America, the cocks shown at a hack fight were often as good as any ever used in a main. Hack fights gave the small cocker an opportunity to participate; the man who could not afford to show a string of well bred birds in a main for a large purse. Some men of moderate circumstances would go to these "hacks" with only one or two cocks to fight and bet a year's savings on their favorites, which they had carefully raised and conditioned.

Nick knew that he would meet "fast company" at this hack fight to be fought in May, near the close of the cocking season. Some of the small cockers would bring only one bird and would fight for amounts ranging from \$500.00 to \$1,500.00. Many of the wealthy

planters would fight a number of birds at this meet for high stakes on each cock.

On this trip to the Halifax county cockpit, Nick had eighteen year old James Avent for company. James was the son of a Nash county cotton planter. The Avents were among the earliest settlers of Nash county. James was very interested in cocking and never missed an opportunity to attend a cockfight.

Nick and Mr. Avent did not go directly to the Halifax cockpit, but arrived at the Old Stage Tavern late in the evening and stayed overnight there. The tavern was only two miles from the cockpit and always accommodated several cockers previous to the day of the fights. The tavern not only supplied food and lodging for its guests, but also stabled and fed their horses.

Early the next morning, after a hearty breakfast; Nick and his companion left the tavern for the Halifax pit. The narrow, winding road ran through a heavily wooded terrain of tall forest Pine. Soon they could hear the shrill crowing of gamecocks and knew they were not far from the cockpit. Some of the cocks crowed simultaneously and each bird sounded different, some with a coarse throaty crowing and others with a fine, keen call.

The crowing of many gamecocks assembled together from all points of the compass, was like a delightful music to these sporting gentlemen on this

Spring morning. As the wagon drew nearer the cockpit, they could see a large assortment of horse drawn vehicles; some had arrived in carriages and buggies, some on horseback with only one cock, and some had come with wagon loads of gamecocks. A large number of those present had spent the night camped here, where the quarters for sleeping were comfortable but far from luxurious. The fragrant odor of roasting beef and pork greeted them as they climbed down from the wagon seat. This roasting had begun on the previous day and was cooking slowly over the live hickory coals for the noontime meal.

"Good morning Mr. Arrington, I knew you would get here," said an acquaintance of Nick. "Did you stay at the tavern?"

Nick answered "Yes" and shook hands with the man who had greeted him and then introduced Mr. Avent. They spent some time shaking hands with the sportsmen gathered here; some had traveled a long distance to attend this meet.

Bottles and demijohns were passed around for those who wanted an early morning drink.

The match-maker was busy weighing in the cocks; give or take two ounces for each pair to be fought. No cock could be more than two ounces heavier than its opponent.

The cockpit was in a central location among the other buildings; which consisted of cock houses, sleeping quarters, coops for cocks, hitching rails, and fire pit for roasting beef. The cockpit had a roof, but was not enclosed by a wall. The tiers of seats surrounding the pit made a seating capacity for twelve hundred sportsmen and spectators.

The setting for the Halifax pit was very beautiful; all of the buildings were built in a Pine grove of large trees. The pine needles which covered the grounds made a natural carpet to walk on. Some of the cock stalls were fastened to the trees, near the pit.

Nick worked each of his birds on one of the padded tables, after removing them from the carrying cases. He did not exhaust his birds with the work but gave each enough leg and wing work to make him limber and supple after their trip in close fitting carrying cases. He then placed his birds in the largest stalls near the cockpit and gave each a small amount of chopped apple; their last feed before battle.

The bright sunlight was shining through some of the Pines now and the men were becoming anxious to get the birds in action and see the feathers start flying. The din of many crowing gamecocks could be heard. Most of the birds present would be "in the pink" or well conditioned. Although this was a hack fight, it would create as much interest as some mains.

Lusty, Irish, Mike Shannon, the referee from Edgcombe county; called out in a loud voice which could be heard above the crowing cocks. "Gentlemen, it is getting late, let us get started and fight these cocks."

After weighing in his cocks Nick and James Avent strolled leisurely past the numerous coops and cock stalls; pausing at some of the finer appearing birds, for a brief look at their lines, carriage, and breeding. Most of the men had removed their gamecocks from the small carrying cases and were using the larger stalls and coops, which prevented cramp and gave the birds more space to stretch their wings and legs. "It will take two or three days to fight all of these birds, Mr. Avent," said Nick.

"Yes, there is a lot of them," answered James, who was fascinated by so many crowing, spirited, well conditioned fighting cocks; of such beauty and variety of plumage. Never had he seen such a collection of gamecocks before; there were solid snow white cocks and some as black as crows with shining, glossy, plumage. There were yellow cocks, grey cocks, light dove blue cocks, dark slate blue, pigeon blue, and red cocks of various shades; light red, dark red, and Mahogany Reds. Some were Spangles with several colors mixed in their plumage, and there were coal black cocks with lemon, orange, and silver hackle and wing feathers.

As soon as a pair of cocks were "heeled" and brought in, the spectators quickly made a wager on

their favorites. The men who owned the cocks, always made their bets before "heeling" or putting on the gaffs. Sometimes the only noise heard after the cocks were pitted, would be the flutter and shuffling sound of the combat, as the men watched as though they were enchanted by this struggle of unyielding courage and death, punctuated occasionally with the crowing of the cooped cocks. Seeing these beautiful birds in action made this sporting event an unforgettable memory to the Avent youth. The color and excitement of this meet made a vivid and lasting impression on him; a cocker was born on this Spring day in May.

Young Avent had that inexplicable experience and realization that every true cocker has in life. He knew why men travel for very long distances, enduring rain, cold, ice and snow to attend a cocking event. The Halifax cockpit was crowded; every seat was occupied as though some magnetic, impelling power had drawn them.

Had this been a wild cat caged with a pack of hounds they would not be attracted, and would not have come. Neither would bears, bulls, coons, badgers, pit dogs, a man fight, or any other kind of combat draw them here. But these masterpieces of the living world which weigh about the same as a new born infant, had qualities which no living creature can equal.

The Gamecock is a combination of physical perfection, unequalled courage, and finesse in battle. His lineage or blood lines are very ancient and are purer than any other thoroughbred. His carriage and lines are more nearly perfect than any living creation. His beauty is often indescribable; and ounce for ounce his strength and endurance surpasses any other creature when in good condition.

On this Spring day young Avent could see that every flash of their brilliant, flame-color plumage and raised hackles spelled SEX; vivid, noble, clean, natural, beautiful and down to earth. With gamecocks the fighting instinct and sex become as one. No other living creature displays such noble courage, beauty, finesse and natural fighting instinct and ability as gamecocks. These beautiful birds struggled for absolute supremacy as "Cock of the Walk." No gamecock will share his hens or any part of his walk or feeding range with another male of his kind. To his hens he has the manners of a Lord Chesterfield and is very considerate, amorous, and courteous, but when gamecocks meet; one must die.

Some impelling force draws men of the highest caliber to game fowl. James Avent thought of the men who follow game fowl; most of them were the "salt of the earth." As he gazed at the valiant feathered knights he thought of their lineage. Their ancestors could have been the pets of ancient Kings,

Maharajas, English Noblemen, or an American President. This same "survival of the fittest" would exist, even if they were not in the hands of men. In the primeval jungle the male birds would fight to the death. Some of these winning cocks today would go on brood yards with carefully selected hens, not too different from their primitive way of life, where the victorious jungle cock took over his harem or flock of hens.

In the dim, distant past, even before the wild horse and wild dog was domesticated; man was attracted to the jungle fowl; probably from their beauty and the unyielding courage of the cocks. From the jungles of India he captured the jungle-fowl and domesticated them, keeping them always near his dwelling. They were never used as food in ancient times as some people think, but were kept as pets and used for sport. Man and game fowl became inseparable, like a man and his dog.

From India these fighting fowl of antiquity slowly spread to nearly every part of the world. The cocks were first fought in their natural "heels" or spurs, which often grow to such a length on gamecocks as to make a very formidable weapon. Sometimes a natural spur was dull or the point had been broken and man found it necessary to sharpen and file the dull or broken point to make his bird equal to his opponent. This sharpening of the natural spurs, did not always

help a fine cock which nature had endowed with a poor, inadequate pair of spurs; or a bird which had lost or broken a spur. Man learned that by the use of artificial spurs or gaffs, his cocks could be equally matched, if his opponent used the same type gaffs, and birds of same weight or size.

In ancient times, man depended largely on his physical prowess and strength to live. All weapons were crude, such as clubs, knives and spears. Robbery by physical force was common on any long trip. So, is it any wonder that the fighting cock appealed to men of all nations in ancient times? They had to fight to live. Thus, the gamecock with its deep courage and beauty became a symbol of life and inflamed the courage of men. All the civilizations of antiquity knew the gamecock. Ancient Egypt, Ninevah, Babylon, Chaldea, ancient Greece, Rome, Arabia, India, and China. All were familiar with the fighting cock. The ancient Phoenician sea-farers did a thriving business with the cock merchants in those days and helped make the sport of cockfighting universal. Archeologists have unearthed much pertaining to the ancient sport while excavating the ruins of cities and tombs of antiquity. Among the relics found were paintings of fighting cocks, coins engraved with fighting cocks, artificial cock spurs from tombs and sculptured stone gamecocks. In the ruins of an ancient Persian King's palace were found large gamecocks

sculptored on the stone walls. To some ancient people the gamecock was sacred and became a Deity.

The breeding and fighting of gamecocks is very expensive and also requires much time and work. A fighting cock is at his best age when two years old. He is very carefully bred and raised to this age, and should have a walk of his own free from all other cocks, to develop his courage. The breeding, walking, training, conditioning, grooming, special feeding, transportation, etc. is costly, not considering the time and labor spent.

If a cocker loses a fight, he not only loses his wager, but his gamecock also. Expense is probably one of the main reasons why cocking has always been such an exclusive sport. Although some men of moderate financial circumstances do follow the sport; they cannot fight many cocks annually each season because it is too expensive. All through history it has been people of wealth and leisure who follow it most. Any man who fights a number of gamecocks each season must necessarily be "well heeled." Cocking since ancient times has generally been considered a gentleman's sport. It has attracted many Kings through history and has also been called, The Royal Sport. It is the cleanest sport in existence and appeals to men of sterling character. Many of its followers have been the highest and most distinguished people in history.

The sport has had very little graft and dishonesty connected with it, as most sports have.

No one had to tell Nick that young Avent would be a game fowl man. There are some things which cockers know and feel without a word spoken. Nick hoped if he ever had a son he would be a cocker and see and understand gamecocks as James Avent now did.

Young Avent assisted Nick by holding the cocks, while Nick applied the steel gaffs over the stub of the natural spurs. After this "heeling" Nick would enter the cockpit with his bird and do his own pitting and handling. He won easily with the first three cocks he fought. His fourth fight was a match against Jack O'Brien.

O'Brien kept a tavern in Halifax county. He often spoke of Ireland where he was born, and he had made several trips back to the "ould sod" to visit his relatives. O'Brien was a small cocker, and did not breed and fight a large number of birds. Never had he fought a main of cocks, but he did attend numerous hacks and was known as a man hard to whip in a single cockfight. Nick had met O'Brien in previous hack fights and knew that he always showed fine cocks in good condition. In a main of cocks, Nick had never been defeated, but in single matches or hacks, he had lost twice to O'Brien in the past.

O'Brien brought his Irish Grey from a stall nearby and set him on the scales at the pit side, allowing Nick to see he was a 5:15 in weight, although the bird had already been weighed by the match-maker. Its healthy glossy plumage shone with brilliancy in the sunlight. The breast and tail feathers were as black as a crow, the hackle, wings, and saddle were a silvery, snow white.

Nick weighed in his beautiful Pyle color cock again at six pounds, for O'Brien's satisfaction. The Pyle was white with red hackle and wing feathers. "An ounce is near enough for a match, is five hundred dollars enough, Misthur Arrington?"

"Yes, five hundred is alright, heel up your Grey," said Nick. The Grey looked familiar to Nick, and he asked, "Is that the same bird I met before, O'Brien?" "Yes, he has killed two of your birds already at hack fights, sorr, this is the Halifax Grey," answered O'Brien slowly.

Nick had heard much talk of the Halifax Grey, the cock was a phenomenon; he had been fought in numerous battles at all the local cockpits; against some of the best cocks in Halifax and the adjoining counties. In each fight he had killed his opponent quickly without receiving any serious injury. None of his fights had lasted more than five pittings.

O'Brien and Nick heeled their birds and waited at the pit side for the battle already occupying the cockpit to end. As soon as the pit was clear and empty, Nick and O'Brien entered the circular pit with cocks cradled in their arms. The spectators hurriedly placed their bets. Although Arrington was usually a favorite with the sports, there was a number of wagers put on O'Brien and some had learned that the famous Halifax Grey was fighting in this match. Nick knelt on the score line and sidestepped his cock a little, while O'Brien talked with a spectator in the first row of seats. Nick liked the sand and clay floor of the arena which had been lightly tamped, but not enough to make it too hard. The ground floor of the pit felt soft and springy beneath his feet. "Two hundred on O'Brien's Grey," called a spectator. "I will take that," answered another. After the crowd stopped calling their bets and became quiet, the referee ordered "Gentlemen, bill your cocks!"

Nick and O'Brien stepped to the center of the arena and introduced the birds by letting them bill or peck each other, while holding firmly to the legs and gaffs with one hand.

"Face your cocks, gentlemen," said the referee.

This time the birds were held so they could flap their wings. Both handlers then took the cocks to the score lines.

"Get ready!" the referee said.

The cocks were set on the score lines.

"Pit your cocks!" At the command "pit" the cocks were released. Both birds left the score lines like a flash when released. They broke high in the center of the cockpit, shuffling fast in the air; moving their legs with the steel weapons attached, much too rapid for the eyes to observe all of their movements. Each cock tried to go high in the air and top his adversary. The Grey cock hung a gaff in the Arrington cock and the referee called, "handle your cocks!" Both handlers took hold of their birds as they lay on the ground.

Arrington gently took hold of the grey's leg and pulled the gaff out of his bird. Both cocks were then carried back to their score lines. After a brief rest, the referee called, "Get Ready!" The cocks were set on the score lines. "Pit your cocks!" The cocks were released, and again they both left the score lines fast. They buckled, rolled and shuffled all over the arena with such speed the referee and handlers found it difficult to stay out of their way. Arrington hung in the Grey, and the referee called, "handle!" O'Brien pulled a steel gaff this time from his bird. The cocks were carried to the score lines and after a brief rest, the referee commanded, "get ready!" and then ordered, "Pit your cocks!" In this third pitting both cocks rushed from the score lines and paused for a second in the center of the pit, eyeing each other with

raised hackles; each seemed to be looking for an instant his opponent would be off guard. Each left the ground and flew into the air at the same time, both shuffling fast. When they came down, Arrington picked up a dead cock. One of the gaffs on the Grey had penetrated some vital portion of the Arrington bird, killing him instantly. "Pay day for the Grey!" a spectator called out in a loud voice. Nick and those who had bet on his bird, began paying their bets to those who had selected the Grey as winner.

"You have a good Grey cock, Mr. O'Brien! Would you sell him?" Nick said, as he handed O'Brien five hundred dollars.

O'Brien was removing the gaffs from the Grey. "No, Misthur Arrington, me ancestors over in ould Oireland would turn over in their graves if I would sell him. He is a pure Oirish Grey that I got from me brother in the ould counthry. Me great gran father had thim Greys, but would never part with even an egg from thim."

Nick did not doubt what O'Brien had said, many of the old Irish strains were priceless, and were kept pure; sometimes remaining with one family for centuries. Never were they bred in large numbers and were kept near the homes at all times. To many of the Irish people, their game fowl were their dearest possession, they almost lived with their fowl. The

Irish fowl were never man shy; they were easy to handle and were very intelligent.

Nick admired this Irish Grey very much; he thought it the best fighting cock he had ever seen. The cock was smart, deep game, and beautiful. It was also a very aggressive cock; seldom cautious, but rushing its opponent and speedily shuffling a coup de grace. The Grey had also killed three of his ace cocks. Nick did not like a cautious, slow gamecock; and wanted this fast aggressive cock to breed with. He had good game fowl, but knew that this cock would improve his fowl, if used as a stud cock. He was almost sure, that here was a bird of royal blood lines; from an old Irish strain, which the O'Briens had kept for centuries. Probably dating back to the ancient Irish Kings.

Nick offered O'Brien fifteen hundred dollars for the Grey.

"No, Misthur Arrington, none of the O'Briens ever sold any of thim, even if we did need money. I have already turned down fifteen hundred for him about a week ago," said O'Brien.

Nick raised the offer to twenty-five hundred, and again O'Brien refused to sell.

Nick could not keep the Halifax Grey from his thoughts. Its lines, carriage, and station; its conformation, its tapering strong wings which enabled it to

fly above its opponent in the pit, its accuracy, and the hard hitting power of its legs. These thoughts remained in Nick's mind while he finished fighting his cocks. Nick won with the majority of the cocks he had brought with him, and at sunset, he and Mr. Avent loaded the winning cocks for a return trip to the tavern, two miles away. They planned to spend the night at the tavern and start early in the morning for their journey back to Nash county. Some of the cockers had arrived at the cockpit late and would not be fortunate enough to get all of their birds matched and fought today. Many of them would spend another day at the Halifax cockpit.

Before climbing up to the wagon seat, Nick thought again of the Halifax Grey. He decided to try once more to obtain the Grey, if O'Brien was still at the fights. He found O'Brien standing by his buggy replacing the stopper in a demijohn from which he had just drank. "Mr. O'Brien, are you going to let me have that Grey cock? I want him for a brood cock. I would not have the same fowl as your brother has in Ireland, if I did get him. I am not asking you to get me hens too. I would only have part of the O'Brien fowl, if I cross him over my hens. I will give you thirty-five hundred for him."

"Misthur Arrington, the O'Briens never did part with any of thim Greys, not even an egg; but as you say sorr, you will not have the pure Oirish Greys like

the O'Briens fight if you do git him. I am going to let you have him for a brood cock, Sorr."

Nick paid O'Brien the thirty-five hundred dollars and carried the Halifax Grey to his wagon. Young Avent opened an empty carrying case and Nick gently placed the cock in it.

When Nick retired for the night, his thoughts were on the Halifax Grey. At dawn the next morning, the first thing he did after dressing was, to go out and look at his pure Irish Grey.

The Grey had received some minor cuts and wounds in battle, but nothing serious or any permanent injury. After returning to The Cedars, Nick carefully selected seven of his best hens and put the Halifax Grey over them.

Cripple Tony

Cripple Tony was with Nick as he selected the seven hens to be mated with the Halifax Grey. Tony studied his newly acquired charge with wonder. He knew that this Grey must be a phenomenal cock if his Master was adding it to his stud of cocks, and mating him with choice hens. Cripple Tony was born at The Cedars and was one of Nick's favorite negroes. At seventeen Tony was injured while cutting timber to build an additional barn on the plantation. The result of this accident left Tony with a slight limp in his walk, even after his foot had apparently healed. The darkies on the plantation noticed the limp and began calling Tony, "Cripple Tony."

After the foot injury, Nick put Tony in the shoe shop to learn the cobbler work, under an aging darky with rapidly declining health. The exterior of the shoe shop looked very much like one of the many slave cabins built in long rows at the rear of the large white mansion. The interior was equipped with an assortment of cobbler tools; benches, stools, table and other requirements for making and repairing shoes and boots. A large fireplace almost completely filled one end of the cabin. Shelves were built on the side walls to hold the shoes and boots to be repaired and when they were finished.

The work of the cobbler and his helper was not as hard as the labor some of the field hands did, and a part of the shoe work could be done while sitting. The cobbler and his helper did all the shoe work of The Cedars people; the footwear of Master and Mistress, the overseer and his family, the artisan darkies, and the field hands. Special art was applied to the shoes and boots of the Master and his family and the plantation overseer. Many of the darkies preferred to go barefoot in Summer, especially the field hands and laborers; this Nick would tolerate, but from Fall until after Easter he insisted that everyone on the place wear shoes.

Cripple Tony learned rapidly under his aging teacher and soon became proficient at the cobbler work. On Sunday afternoons, when the weather was fair, Tony would spend several hours looking at his Master's game fowl. On one of these Sabbath evenings, he asked Nick, "Massa Nick, can I feed yo young stags in de pins, sumpin green?" "Yes, Tony," replied Nick. Nick watched Tony gather the tender blades of grass which grew in abundance near the pens, on each side of the back road. The cooped stags made a happy, contented noise of glook, glook, glook, as Tony dropped the green food in their pens.

Tony was fat and jovial and often displayed his sound white teeth with his broad smile. He appeared to be always in good spirits and his sunny disposition

seemed to radiate to the other darkies, causing them to like him. Except for his injured foot, he enjoyed excellent health. The fact that he walked with a limp never seemed to worry him any. Tony liked game fowl so well that Nick took him out of the shoe shop; replacing him with another young negro who appeared to be suitable for the cobbler work. He then assigned Cripple Tony to care for his game fowl.

This was a full time job and the only work which Tony did. Daily, year after year Tony devotedly cared for Nick's game fowl. Sometimes Nick would take Tony along to gather up some of the mature gamecocks from their walks to be trained and conditioned for battle. Tony diligently looked after all of the early March hatched baby chicks. To each of the penned stags, Cripple Tony gave fresh, clean water daily and also saw that each bird had green food, grit, oyster shell, charcoal, and other things necessary for their health.

Nick liked the care and attention which Tony gave his fowl and learned that he could depend on Tony. His fowl would never be neglected by Tony, and Tony understood that young fowl cared for correctly, would make healthy, fighting cocks when mature.

He liked this work his Master had assigned him to and gave the baby chicks and young fowl such fond and loving care, Nick named his strain of fighting

fowl "Cripple Tonys" in honor of the faithful slave whose patient care and proper feeding of the young fowl often resulted later in victory for his mature birds in the cockpit.



Andy's Visit

With the cocking season almost over, Nick devoted more time to managing his crops; although his overseer, Mr. Garrison, was very efficient, Nick believed in the old saying, "The Lord of a large plantation should look diligently to all its operations, and be last to retire and first to arise, if he is successful."

The Summer months passed without The Cedars having its usual number of guests. There were only a few visitors from the neighboring plantations, who would drive up the avenue of Cedars in their carriages on Sunday afternoons for a brief stay.

Nick liked to have company and thought of the times the big house had been filled with guests, some staying for a six months visit. He finished his noon meal, and went out on the wide front porch to relax. He had been busy all morning riding his black stallion to inspect the fields of snowy white cotton, which his darkies were picking. The tobacco crop had been good, and was already gathered and cured. The crowing of his gamecocks was the only sound which interrupted the quiet and stillness of the warm October

afternoon. The darkies produced a colorful scene as they quietly went about their chores; their heads covered with gay bandanas. Sometimes they crooned a tune, but none seemed to be in a singing mood this Autumn day.

As Nick sat quietly puffing one of his long cigars while reminiscing of the many guests The Cedars had given hospitality to, a coach turned into the avenue of cedars from the main road. As the coach came nearer the big house Nick had a better view of the liveried negro driver wearing a high top hat. The driver was perched high above the enclosed part of the coach.

Nick spoke to the negro boy who sat on the steps, "Tell the others we have company and to get out here quick to help with the horses and luggage." "Yas suh, Massa Nick," the boy answered, and hurriedly disappeared around the side of the house. He spied Aunt Basil first. "Company at de front doe, an look lack portant folks," said the boy, thinking of the driver dressed in livery and wearing the stove pipe hat. "Massa Nick want somebody to help wid de hosses an bags, rat now." Aunt Basil called two of the darkies who always worked the flowers and yard near the mansion.

"Massa Nick want you at de front, rat now," she told them.

The two darkies reached the front just as the team of matching chestnut color horses were pulled to a halt. One of the negroes stepped in front of the team; reached up and took hold of the reins. The coach door opened and revealed a tall, dignified gentleman of striking appearance. The driver of the coach climbed down from his high seat. "Help you, Massa Andy?" he asked. "No, I just need to get out and stretch my legs a little." Nick stood at the side of the coach as the tall gentleman stepped out.

"Young fellow, do you recognize me?" he asked.

"Well, this is sure a surprise, President Jackson," said Nick extending his hand to shake with the President.

"You were about twelve years old when I saw you last," said the President as he shook hands with Nick. "I remember, you were at The Cedars when dad was living," said Nick. "Yes, I knew your father well, he was one of my best friends," answered Mr. Jackson.

"Do you have any children yet Nick?" "Yes, I have two little girls," replied Nick.

Nick instructed his negroes to take the President's luggage to the front guest room. Included in the luggage was the President's famed liquor chest which he always carried on all his trips. The chest when closed looked very much like an ordinary piece of luggage, but when opened, it revealed a portable bar with several decanters and flasks filled with whiskey, brandy,

and rum. The chest was lined with a brightly colored plush material and contained several liquor glasses neatly fitted in plush holders.

President Jackson was never without his liquor chest when traveling, and kept the chest separate from the other luggage. The liquor chest was carried inside the coach at all times.

Nick assigned the driver of the coach to one of the cabins near the big house, and gave orders to stable the horses and roll the coach in the carriage house. Ned, one of his favorite house boys was assigned to the President during his stay at The Cedars.

This negro was to stay near the President at all times during his visit and tend to all of his valet services, see that his shoes were polished in the mornings, and see that he was comfortable in every way. To each of his guests, Nick always assigned a darky during their stay. To a lady guest, a negro girl or woman would be assigned. To a gentleman guest, a negro boy or man would be assigned. If he had twelve guests, then a total of twelve negroes were assigned to them for valet service.

"I noticed your cotton on the way here, looks like you have a good crop," said the President. "Yes, and I had a good tobacco crop too; it is already in and cured," answered Nick.

"I am going up to my room for a few minutes, and would like to sit with you on the porch when I come

down," said the President. "Show Mr. Jackson where the front guest room is Ned!" Nick ordered. "I don't need him, I know The Cedars, Nick," said Mr. Jackson.

The President bathed his face and hands after reaching his room. He liked the convenience of running water and the lavatory which was made possible by a windmill pumping the deep well water into an elevated huge wooden tank. Most of the plantations would have a bowl and pitcher in the bedrooms for washing. After drying his hands and face he drank a glass of the cool well water and went back down the winding stairway to the front porch where Nick was waiting for him. Nick offered his guest a cigar and he accepted it. Mr. Jackson puffed at the cigar as Nick studiously observed his illustrious guest. "Very good cigar, Nick," said Mr. Jackson. "Yes, it is made from imported tobacco, the States don't grow a good cigar tobacco," Nick answered.

A rapid panorama of thoughts and imaginary visions unrolled and passed through Nick's mind as he gazed at President Andrew Jackson, now on his second term as President. Everyone knew or had heard of "Old Hickory" as the President was sometimes called.

In these fleeting minutes Nick thought of the President's history. The Indian Wars, The Battle of

New Orleans where Jackson was a General and defeated the British, although heavily outnumbered. The duels he had engaged in, and had come out the victor. The shoulder wound he had received in a pistol duel which continually bothered him for years. His plantation "The Hermitage" located about fifteen miles from Nashville, Tennessee where he raised his slate blue fighting fowl. His fiery, quick temper. His fondness for good whiskey and brandy, gambling at cards, horse racing and most especially cockfighting, which seemed to be his ruling passion.

On several occasions, Andy Jackson had used the spacious carpeted rooms of the White House for a cockfight which the Congressmen and Senators heartily approved of, and were delighted with. His courage and open mind; always speaking what he thought and considered right. It had been said, that Old Satan would not frighten Andy Jackson, even if they happen to meet on a dark night. His wonderful personality which others seemed to feel when they were near him.

Nick was first to break the brief silence. "Do you always travel about the country alone, Mr. Jackson?" "Yes, most of the time. I always take old Zeb along to drive the coach. I keep him dressed well in cold weather, and when it is extremely cold I fill his cup about half full of liquor and pass it up to him. Old Zeb feels safe and at ease on any road, if I am in the coach."

The Mistress of The Cedars had all of the kitchen help busy preparing the evening meal. After the negro maids finished with the guest room, she made an inspection to see that everything was in order.

The late evening was much cooler than the early part of the afternoon had been, and the large peacock fans were not needed to make the dining room comfortable while Mr. Jackson was dining. The President was seated at one end of the long table with Nick at the other. On Nick's right at the side of the table, his wife Mary and the two little girls, Rebecca and Anna were seated. The President ate heartily of the numerous dishes the darkies brought from the kitchen. Platters of hickory smoked ham, fried chicken, biscuits, corn bread, large bowls of hominy, rice, gravies and an assortment of vegetables well seasoned with butter or pork. For dessert there were several kinds of pie and cake to select from. "Do you do any hunting, Nick?" Mr. Jackson asked. "Yes, a little; I get two or three wild turkeys each year, some partridges, and sometimes a deer. Do you like venison or game of any kind?" Nick asked. "Yes I do, especially partridges," said Mr. Jackson.

After supper Nick and President Jackson retired to the parlor. Nick ordered Ned to bring his best whiskey and apple brandy to the parlor. "Would you like a Julep, Mr. Jackson?"

"No, I drink my liquor straight or neat as the British would say," answered Mr. Jackson. Ned returned with a silver tray loaded with glasses, two decanters, and a silver pitcher of cool water. He placed the tray on the massive marble top table.

"Do we need a fire kindled in here, Andy? I believe the weather has changed a little since early this afternoon."

"No, I am not cold, Nick, a fire would probably make the room too warm." "That will be all for now, Ned," said Nick. "Yas suh, Massa Nick." "Would you like some brandy, Andy?" "Yes" answered the President. Nick poured two drinks of the apple brandy. Mr. Jackson drank the brandy slowly. After taking the last swallow, he remarked, "Damn good brandy, Nick, I have never tasted better."

"That brandy is twelve year old, nothing but the best for friend Andy Jackson," said Nick. "Do you make it here on the place, Nick?" "Yes, I will show you my still house tomorrow. Nash county is noted for its fine apple brandy, it is sometimes called Old Nash! Would you have another glass?"

Yes I will, I drink grain liquor most of the time, never had any brandy that good before," said Mr. Jackson.

The two men talked some of politics and briefly of fast horses but the conversation soon turned to

game fowl as would be expected when Andy Jackson and Nick Arrington got together. Nick's wife noticed the change in weather and ordered one of the darkies to kindle a fire in the President's bedroom. "Just enough fire to take away the chill!" she commanded. Nick and the President had a long game fowl talk along with several glasses of brandy.

"What are the blood lines of your strain, Nick?" asked Mr. Jackson. "That is a long story, Andy. Grandfather Arthur Arrington had Old English Black Breasted Red game fowl, which came direct from England. The stags come exactly alike in color and appearance; like peas in a pod. He bred and fought them for a long time without adding any new blood or crossing with any other strain. During the latter part of his life he made a trip to the little town of Bath, North Carolina, which is on the coast. A ship captain there had a snow white, pure Oriental gamecock, reputed to have come direct from a Maharaja in India. There were several other men who wanted the White Oriental but grandfather finally got him at a fancy price. He fought the Oriental several times and then bred him over his Old English hens. The Oriental blood seemed to improve his game fowl and this Old English and Oriental cross is what my father had for years.

After a visit to Charleston, South Carolina, dad brought home a rare Spanish gamecock of solid pigeon

blue color. The Spanish Blue was fast and game, and proved himself good several times, before dad mated him over his hens.

A short time ago I bought the Halifax Grey, a pure Irish Grey, and bred him over my hens. "I have heard of the Halifax Grey, who whipped all the ace cocks in several counties," interrupted Mr. Jackson. "Yes, and he killed three of my best cocks too," said Nick. "He was the last new blood added to the Arrington fowl. So, my Cripple Tonys are made up of Old English Black Breasted Red, White Oriental, Spanish Blue, and Irish Grey. They come Spangle and Pyle in color. Some will show feathers from all four of the strains they are made from, including some pigeon blue plumage. I am not afraid to match them against anyone's birds, anywhere, and for any amount."

The two game fowl enthusiasts talked until late; then climbed the winding stairway together, and said good night at the top of the stairs.

When Mr. Jackson awoke for the second time in the morning, he got out of bed and bathed his face and hands, dressed, and walked out on the wide upper porch from one of the doors of his bedroom. He inhaled the refreshing morning air with a deep breath. The cedar trees made the air delightfully fragrant, and the sun rising in the East, gave promise of another bright and fair October day.

The beginning of the Autumn day viewed from the balcony porch was very beautiful, with the sunshine, blue skies, and evergreen trees. The folks of The Cedars had already begun their day. Several teams of mules had been hitched to wagons and the darkies were on their way to the fields. The penned stags proved their vigilance and activity of the morn, with their shrill crowing. This morning Mr. Jackson went down the winding stairway which led to the back portion of the house. The bottom of the back stairway was near the dining room.

Nick saw the President as he reached the bottom of the stairway. "Good morning, Andy, did you have a good rest last night?" "Yes, very good Nick," replied Mr. Jackson. "I suppose you are ready for some breakfast now. I always go out and walk a little before I eat in the morning," said Nick. "Did the overseer wake you up with the bell, Andy?" "Yes, but I went back to sleep and had a good nap after that. That bell has a good tone, loud and clear but not irritating," said Mr. Jackson. "You have never seen the bell, but I will show it to you in a little while," said Nick, feeling proud of his unique, large, solid coin silver plantation bell.

The odor from the kitchen was very pleasant to Mr. Jackson as he and Nick were seated in the large dining room; which had so many windows, it appeared to be made almost entirely of glass.

The darkies brought out a variety of breakfast food from the kitchen. There were sausage, fried hickory smoke ham, gravy, eggs, two kinds of hominy, butter, biscuits, pancakes, cane syrup, several kinds of preserves and jam, coffee and a decanter of whiskey. "Would you like to walk over the grounds near the house, after breakfast, Andy?" "Yes, Nick, a walk would be good for me this morning," Mr. Jackson replied. "Alright, we can walk this morning and we will take a ride this afternoon and look at some of the gamecocks on open, free range walks, if you like," said Nick.

After breakfast the two gentlemen walked leisurely over the grounds of the Arrington home. They strolled slowly through the carriage house adjoining the horse stable which now sheltered the President's coach and the Arrington coach, a Phaeton carriage, two fringe top surreys, three buggies and a buckboard. "I use the buckboard a lot for light hauling, Mr. Jackson." As they walked through the horse stable, Nick said, "Some of the horses are out in the pasture, I don't know how many mules and wagons I have; Mr. Garrison, the overseer, keeps a record of them." The President paused for a few minutes to look at some of Nick's hunting hounds which were kept near the horse stable.

From the stable they walked slowly through the slave quarters. "Like a town or village Nick, you

have a lot of negroes," said the President, who also owned negroes which he housed at his plantation "The Hermitage." Nick showed Mr. Jackson the spring house where the milk was kept in warm weather.

A rectangular building was built over the spring and sheltered a concrete space below the spring. The shallow concrete space looked something like a wading pool for children and was filled with crock jars of milk which were kept cool by the spring water. At one end of the concrete space, shelves had been built just a little above the water level. Butter was stored on these shelves slightly above the spring water, to keep it cool and firm.

Below this space grew the mint, which thrived best in a cool moist place. The mint was used in juleps, and candy making. Below where the mint grew, the spring water trickled into a small pool where the "fish box" was kept under water. The "fish box" was a large box with a wooden frame, covered with strips of cane. The cane strips had been woven together leaving a mesh that water could pass through. During the summer Nick's darkies like to strip to the waist and seine fish in the nearby streams of Nash county. Sometimes they would fish and swim in Tar River, but when using a seine net, they had better results fishing in the creeks of Stoney, Swift, Turkey, Fishing, Moccasin, Sappony, and Toisnot. The negro men usually caught more fish than they could use at

once. The fish box was then pulled out of the pool of water; the surplus fish put in the large box; then the top was shut and the box sank back in the pool. The fish would live for months in this watery cage, and supplied the "big house" with fresh fish at any time they desired them.

Next was the still house, a three room building, located near the spring. The first room they entered contained a copper still mounted on a field stone furnace; at the sides of the room were several empty barrels to hold the grain mash while it was fermenting. The next room was called the rectifying room. Here the raw liquor was filtered through clean fine sand and charcoal until all fusel oil and other impurities were removed from the distilled spirits. The last room was called the aging room where the liquor was stored in charred oak kegs and barrels to age.

Mr. Jackson had seen many small distilleries, the larger plantations often distilled their own whiskey, brandy, and rum for their own use and for guests and friends. On Christmas and holidays the slaves were sometimes given a good ration of the distilled spirits, and it was used as a medicine and cure all for every ailment from toothache to rattle snake bite.

"I fire the still in the Spring and Fall. The darkies like rum and I make a run of it sometimes from molasses," said Nick. They walked past the smoke house, well stocked with hickory smoked hams, shoulders

and bacon. Mr. Jackson spent more time around the unique gamecock pens, pausing at some and carefully studying the lines, carriage, conformation, legs and wings of the cocks. He thought Nick's cock house one of the best he had ever seen. Here the mature two year old cocks were "put up" after they were brought in from open walks. They remained here during a period of training and conditioning. Here they received special feeding, exercise and grooming; which put them "in the pink" for battle, and Nick's cock house had all the requirements for doing this.

Nick and Andy walked toward the scaffold which supported the plantation bell. Proudly Nick pointed up at the large bell, "That is what woke you this morning, Mr. Jackson, and has the tone you liked. Solid coin silver!" Nick said. "What!" exclaimed the President. "Yes, I put over four bushel measures of silver coins in it and watched them cast it at the foundry," answered Nick.

"I have never seen but one other solid silver plantation bell, and that belonged to a wealthy sugar planter in Louisiana. Your bell is much larger than the one he has," said the President.

On one side of the great house lay the formal gardens of The Cedars. A part of this area was beautifully landscaped and resembled a formal English garden in appearance. Several darkies were assigned to care for the gardens and they were always well kept,

for this was their only work. Both native and imported shrubs and flowers had been planted in the gardens. "The wife and children like this place," said Nick to Andy. An octagon shaped Summer house enclosed with fancy lattice work had been built in the center of the garden. Rebecca and Anna were at play a few feet from the Summer house. An aged Negro woman sat near them; she had helped care for them since their birth.

A small stream flowed through the place with willow trees growing on the banks. A scattered growth of cedars dotted the gardens and a part of the area was used for the cultivation of herbs and spices. "This is the wife's herb and spice garden. She is very proud of it. I don't even know the name of the various plants she grows here. About all we ever use from here is sage for sausage making."

"Your gardens are beauty spots and pleasant too," said the President. "It is about dinner time, Mr. Jackson," said Nick, thinking Andy who was much older than him, would be tired from his morning walk. "Yes, and it is getting hot too," Mr. Jackson replied. The two men started toward the mansion, and after reaching the house they sat on the front porch until the noon meal was ready to be served.

At noon Nick and Andy were again seated at each end of the long table with Nick's wife and children at the side of the table. A darky stood behind each one

that was seated to help pass the various dishes which were brought from the kitchen. This was a hot Indian Summer day, especially during the noon hour. The two overhead fans were both used at this meal. A crystal chandelier hung in the center of the ceiling and over the middle of the long dining table. On each side of the chandelier was a large fan made from Peacock feathers. The fans were swung on hinges attached to the ceiling. A strong silk cord was fastened to each hinge and ran along the ceiling, through pulleys and down the wall. Nick and the President each had a negro boy behind them, standing near the wall to keep the fans swinging. Keeping the fans moving was not a laborious work; only a slight pull was needed to make the fans swing. All during the noon meal, the steady swish, swish, swish, swish of the fans could be heard.

“Nick, you have the best plantation in the entire country, and probably the best fighting cocks too. Your place is better than any I have ever visited, and Old Hickory has been around. I have seen all of the South, including Louisiana and Mississippi. Your place is better than my place too, The Hermitage in Tennessee.”

When the noon meal was over, Nick gave an order to Ned. “Tell Cripple Tony I want to see him and then find Ben around the stable and tell him to hitch the matching team of mares to the surrey and

bring it around to the front." "Yas suh, Massa Nick." Nick and Andy went out on the front porch to wait on the surrey. Cripple Tony came limping into view before they were settled in their seats. "You sen fo me, Massa Nick?" "Yes Tony, Mr. Jackson and I are going for a ride to look at some of the cocks on the walks. You get one of the cocks which crows the most and put him in a carrying case; then bring him here." "Yas suh, Massa Nick," said Tony, understanding why his master wanted a cock which crowed often.

Ben hitched the horses and brought the carriage to the front of the mansion. When Tony returned with the cock, Nick ordered Ben to go back to the stable. "You drive Tony, and set the carrying case up front with you." "Yas suh, Massa Nick."

Nick and the President got in the rear seat of the surrey. "Tony knows where some of the walks are and always helps when I put the birds out or take them up from their walks," said Nick. "Fine day for a ride, Nick," said President Jackson.

The clay and sand road made a smooth, easy ride, for the start of their afternoon. The cock crowed lustily from the close fitting carrying case. "These mares are very gentle and easy to handle and drive, but the black stallion you saw this morning, is my horse solely, no one can ride him but me," said Nick.

"There is a cock on walk around the next curve, Tony," said Nick. "Yas suh, Massa Nick."

As the surrey turned the curve in the road they could see a log house setting back about a hundred yards to the right. Tony pulled the horses into the narrow road which led up to the side of the log house. "Whoa!" Tony halted the horses. The cock in the carrying case crowed. From a field on the other side of the house came an answer from a fighting cock. The cock in the case crowed again and the cock on walk came running where the men in the carriage could see him.

He halted, stood with head high as though listening; then crowed again. The cock in the carrying case crowed again. The cock on walk came running with wings spread as though partly flying towards the surrey. He was now sure the invader was somewhere near this vehicle, yet he could not see this intruder of his private domain; his feeding grounds; His walk where he reigned supreme over his harem of hens, now had another male of his kind on it. This intrusion on his walk had aroused him to intense jealousy, and hatred.

The cock in the surrey crowed again and he answered and run all the way around the surrey and under it several times looking up all the time. After both cocks crowed again, the cock on the ground began looking up at the exact spot where the carrying

case set. "We better go, Tony, he will fly up in the front seat soon if we don't." "Yas suh, Massa Nick." "Gid up!" Tony spoke to the horses giving them a slap with the reins. "Fine cock," said President Jackson as they drove away. "Wait until you see this next one down the road, he is an ace cock and I have him mated with good hens. There is no other fowl of any kind within three miles of the place, so, it makes a very good brood yard."

They drove up to the small farm house to see the ace cock Nick had mentioned. A white man sat on a bench in the front yard whittling on a piece of soft pine. "Good evening, Mr. Arrington," the man said, as soon as the horses were pulled to a halt. "Good evening, Mr. Hodges, just come by to take a look at my game chickens," said Nick, not wasting any time to introduce the President. "There they are," said Mr. Hodges pointing to the fowl feeding near a wagon located at the side of the farm house. Andy had already spied the cock and nine hens which were vigorously scratching in the earth.

The cock and hens moved nearer to the surrey which enabled the men to get a better view of them. The President studied the gamecock with the eyes of an experienced cockfighter. The cock in the carriage did not crow and neither did the one with the hens. The President silently gazed at the cock which stood proud and erect with its head held high. It had all

the fine points a gamecock man looks for in a fighting cock; high station, good conformation and carriage. The hackle feathers looked like fine gold and its other plumage shone with iridescence in the warm Autumn sunlight.

"A very fine, beautiful gamecock with good wings, strong, broad back, and long, strong legs, as fine as I have ever seen," said the President. "Yes, and he can fight just as good as he looks," said Nick. "I would like to own that cock, Nick," said the President. Nick did not answer the President's last remark, as he turned to Mr. Hodges and asked, "Have a good cotton crop, Mr. Hodges?" "Yes, the cotton crop looks fair, Mr. Arrington."

Mr. Hodges was a small farmer who found it difficult to make a living cultivating his few acres without any help.

"I thought you would like the cock there," said Nick as they drove away. The cock in the case crowed as they turned into the main road. The next little farm house they approached, had a grove of pine trees growing near it. The cock in the carrying case crowed before Tony brought the surrey to a stop. Out of the Pine woods came a beautiful Red Wing Pyle colored cock running towards the carriage. It circled the carriage several times, pausing only to flap its wings and crow. Its body was white except for hackle and wings, which were blood red.

Two small boys were at play in the yard. "Where is your dad?" asked Nick. "Both pop and mom have gone to town, Mr. Arrington." Nick tossed a quarter to each of the small boys and said, "Don't let anything happen to that rooster, take good care of him." "Yes sir, we will, Mr. Arrington," said the oldest boy as he put the quarter in his pocket.

Nick and Andy spent most of the afternoon looking at the gamecocks on open, free range walks, but none could compare with the one at Mr. Hodges' farm, the President thought.

The sun was sinking in the West when they reached The Cedars. A negro boy took hold of the horses as Nick and the President got out of the carriage.

"Tony, you leave the surrey and horses with Ben and start feeding the penned birds, it is getting late." "Yas suh, Massa Nick." "You go with Tony and help him feed," Nick said to the boy who held the horses. "Yas suh, Massa Nick."

The ride in the carriage seemed to sharpen their appetites and both Nick and Andy ate a hearty evening meal.

As they retired to the parlor, Andy said, "I will be leaving you early in the morning, Nick." "Sorry to see you go, Andy, wish you would stay longer," said Nick, who sincerely liked the President. "I have

to get back to The Hermitage and then go to Washington from there," said Andy.

After the two close friends had a cigar, several glasses of Old Nash, and another game fowl talk, they retired.

Andy did not go back to sleep the next morning after the soft tones of the silver bell awoke him. He arose early and called Ned to help him get packed. "Go tell Zeb we are leaving early this morning," he said to Ned. "Yas suh, Mr. Jackson," answered Ned.

During breakfast Nick again expressed his regret to see Andy leave after such a short visit. Nick sent another ducky to help Ned load the President's luggage.

"That liquor chest goes in the coach with me," said Andy as they prepared to leave. He said good-bye to Mrs. Arrington and the two little girls first as they stood on the front porch. "Nick, I would like to have you visit me at The Hermitage sometime, if you ever get up to Tennessee."

Just before Andy got in the coach, Nick said, "I have a gift for you Andy." He walked a few steps to where Tony stood and picked up a large carrying case made from strips of cane woven together like the chair bottoms in the slave quarters were made. "This is the gamecock you liked so well at the Hodges' house." Nick had sent Cripple Tony with another

darky back to get the cock his friend had admired and liked so well. Nick liked the cock himself and no one could have bought the bird at any price, but he had decided to put another cock over the hens at the Hodges' farm for breeding, and give his friend Andy the fine bird.

"Thank you, Nick, I will fight him, and if he wins, I will mate him to some of my blue hens." "Here is something else for you too," said Nick, as he reached out and took a demijohn of "Old Nash" which a darky standing near had brought out to the coach as Nick had ordered.

The Crested Letter

Nick sat on the front porch thinking of his friend Andy Jackson who was now well on his way to The Hermitage, his home in Tennessee. Andy would rest at some of the other plantations with friends, or stay at some of the taverns on his way home.

It was about time for Fred to return from Hilliardston, and sometimes he brought news, or a letter from friends or relatives. No one had to tell Fred to be in Hilliardston when the mail coach arrived. One of the daily chores of the negro youth was to ride a mule to Hilliardston after the mail. The Post Office was located in one corner of a general merchandise store and any mail for The Cedars would be promptly turned over to Fred, as he was well known by the store-keeper. Fred used the back road on his trips to Hilliardston.

When he returned, he hitched the mule and inquired, "Where Massa Nick?" "He on de front poach," answered one of the yard darkies. Fred walked promptly around the side of the house toward the front before putting up the mule. "Mail fo you, Massa Nick," said Fred, staring at the strange looking letter as he handed it to his master. Nick did not hastily open the letter, but studied the red wax seal, decorated with three short ribbons on the flap of the

envelope. The strange looking envelope had all the earmarks of Royalty, Nick thought.

At first he thought the red wax seal was a coat of arms but on close inspection he could see that it was the seal of the President of Mexico. Nick opened the crested letter slowly; the penmanship was excellent and most of the letter was written in English on fine, thick parchment paper. It read—

Senor Arrington:

I have heard much of you and your gamecocks. You are sometimes spoken of as, The Traveling Cocker. It has been said that you will go anywhere to fight your cocks, if the stakes are large enough to interest you. I have many fighting cocks Senor Arrington, and I believe my Spanish Blues are superior to anything you have.

If you will bring your cocks to Mexico, I will make the betting worthwhile to you. I will fight for any amount you desire and I will use American gaffs. As one cocker to another, you will be shown the best hospitality which I can offer you, while you are in Mexico.

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna
Presidente de Mexico
Mexico City, Mexico

Again at the finish of the letter, red wax had been melted and dropped on the parchment paper, and the seal of the Presidente applied while the wax was soft and warm.

Nick finished smoking his cigar while he thought over the contents of the letter. So, The Little Napoleon of The West had challenged him to a cock match. The cocky, arrogant, little General who possessed great courage and military skill now held all Mexico in his power. In reality, Santa Anna was now an absolute Dictator. He had unlimited wealth at his disposal. The coffers of Mexico were now his; to dip into and use in anyway he wished. The other men who had come to power before Santa Anna had always been absolute Dictators and most of them had used their power selfishly. The Mexican people would not know or expect anything different from Santa Anna, thought Nick.

Fighting cocks was Santa Anna's ruling passion and a fabulous fortune now awaited the man who could defeat Santa Anna in a large cock match or main. Nick thought of the many times he had wished the mains he fought, were for larger stakes. Seldom would the combines who showed a main of cocks against him, make the purse as large as he wanted to wager; but the Dictator of Mexico would fight for any amount without quibbling. Nick's face had a faint smile of confidence as he decided to go meet Santa Anna on his own soil. "Go find Mr. Garrison and tell him I want to see him," he ordered Ned, who usually stayed near his master unless assigned to some guest. "Yas suh, Massa Nick." Mr. Garrison, the overseer, appeared

about an hour later; it had taken Ned some time to find him.

When the overseer came within speaking distance, Nick asked, "Mr. Garrison can we spare nine of our largest wagons for several months or a year?" "I think so, Mr. Arrington. If it leaves us too short, we can always get three or four wagons from your place in Edgcombe county. They don't use all the wagons they have over there," answered the overseer, knowing Nick had planned a long trip to require the use of the wagons for as much as a year.

"I want the wagons covered, Mr. Garrison. Start the darkies to building frames over the wagons for the canvas covers. You will need the artisan negroes too, for I will want a lot of cock stalls built. Let me know how much canvas you will need for the large wagons and I will send to Nashville after it. I want our best mules for this trip too, Mr. Garrison." "We have a lot of mules to select from Mr. Arrington, you don't need to worry about good stock for your trip. I will get started at once on the frames for the canvas covers," Mr. Garrison replied.

Late in the evening before retiring, Nick wrote an answer to Santa Anna's challenge. He had never been to Mexico but he had heard of the pass to the North called "Paso del Norte" by the Mexicans. A few people claimed this land belonged to the Texan Americanos who had settled there, while others

thought it was a part of the Louisiana Purchase from France; but no one was at all certain about the boundaries of Texas, or who owned the land just North of the Pass. This land was generally thought to be a part of Mexico. Nick addressed the letter and wrote—

Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna
Presidente de Mexico
Mexico City, Mexico

Dear Sir:

I will meet you in Mexico, North of Paso del Norte with three hundred gamecocks. I cannot say exactly what date I will arrive there this Spring, but I will start my wagons on the 21st day of November. I do not raise many small light weight cocks. You should select your large heavy cocks to match mine, when we weigh in; give or take not more than two ounces.

Gaffs shall be of any length round steel and sharp only on the point. No Spanish blade or slasher gaffs to be used at all.

Yours Sincerely,
Nicholas W. Arrington

Nick personally attended to the mailing of his answer to Santa Anna, early the next morning.



The Wagon Train to Mexico

Nick knew he must work fast to get the wagons rolling by November the twenty-first. He would need company on this long trip; men or boys who knew how to work and condition gamecocks for battle, and drive teams of four and six mules. He contacted a number of game fowl men and some of the more daring cockers readily agreed to go with him on the adventuresome journey at his expense, while some promptly refused, saying the trip would be too long and dangerous. One of his best friends, Captain Robert Drake gladly joined Nick in this venture and furnished one of the large wagons and team of six mules. James Avent accompanied Nick on this trip, and he also drove his own wagon and mules. These two large wagons with nine belonging to Nick made a total of eleven wagons for the long trip over wild, unsettled territory.

Mr. Garrison had put the darkies to cutting stout, pliant, framing wood to support the canvas covers. The flexible, easy to bend framing was soon arched and fastened in place on the sides of the spacious, long

wagons. As soon as the canvas covers were on, the artisan darkies who were skilled in carpentry work, were started on the building of cock stalls to go in the wagons.

“Mr. Garrison, the cock stalls don’t need to be extra large because each cock will be taken out and worked some daily on the padded tables,” Nick instructed his overseer. “I want thirty-six stalls in each of our nine wagons; two stalls high, with eighteen stalls on each side of the wagon. The work bench or padded table will be built at the front of the wagon behind the driver’s seat; this will leave plenty of space in the middle of the wagons between the rows of stalls on each side.”

While the cock stalls were being built, Nick and Cripple Tony were busy gathering the mature cocks from the open, free range walks. Captain Drake and James Avent also assisted Nick in picking up his choice birds from the widely scattered walks.

Nick worked as hard as any of his darkies during the preparation of his wagon train for the long journey. The safety and welfare of all these people was his responsibility. All provisions were to be furnished by him, and must be replenished all along the route to Mexico and back. He retired late each night after thinking over the supply list, hoping not to forget anything. There would be two persons to each wagon;

a total of twenty-two people. His supply list included, feed and grain for the mules and his gamecocks, cigars, tobacco, whiskey, brandy, corn meal, wheat flour, beans, salt, hams, shoulders, and bacon from his smoke house, potatoes, apples, onions, yams, molasses, sugar, coffee, soap, axle grease for the wagons, a small chest of common drugs, five boxes of assorted stick candy of cinnamon, horehound, mint, lemon, and sassafras. Late each evening he would add something else to his list of supplies and see that it was loaded the next day.

It was November the 19th before the last of the gamecocks were brought in from their walks. Captain Drake's large wagon was filled with supplies and was used as a chuck wagon. James Avent's wagon was filled with barrels of water. There would be long stretches of prairie on this trip when water would probably be scarce. Strapped under each wagon also were several kegs of water. A total of three hundred and twenty-four of Nick's Cripple Tonys were housed in nine of the wagons. Sacks of oats and other grain had been stacked between the rows of cock stalls with care not to obstruct the watering, feeding, and handling of the fighting cocks.

On the morning of November 21st, 1833, eleven large hooded wagons made a picturesque sight as they started on one of the greatest cock matches ever fought. Nick studied the route charted for his wagon

train, it would take them West across North Carolina, through Tennessee, through Arkansas, then slightly in a Southwest direction through most of the wild Oklahoma and Texas territory. Every man on this journey was well armed; and for a good reason. Much of the territory they would pass through would be the haunt of bandits; and Indians who were not always friendly and there was a possibility that some of them would learn of the huge amount of money the wagon train was carrying.

Two of the men had some knowledge of cooking and were quickly nominated for this work. Experienced cockers drove the nine wagons which hauled the gamecocks. Each driver taking care of eighteen cocks while in transit. Nick had instructed these men to take each cock out and work him daily on the padded table, and he often helped work the gamecocks himself. Santa Anna would not find him easy to defeat, he thought. What could be better for the Dictator, than go against three hundred cramped, coop stale cocks? Daily before feeding and giving them a cup of clean, fresh water, each cock would be given a few minutes leg and wing work and a massage. Conditioners worked the gamecocks on padded tables as the long, heavy prairie schooners rolled slowly over the plains of Oklahoma and Texas territory. While one drove, the other would work half of the cocks in the wagon.

The men did not think of the danger they could encounter on this adventure, but seemed to enjoy every minute of the ever changing scenery of this wild beautiful country. Some talked of The Little Napoleon of The West and tried to guess what he would look like. At night some of them would unroll their bedding near the camp fire if the weather was fair. When it rained, they would sleep in the wagons between the rows of cock stalls, with fragrant hay and straw beneath their bed roll.

Five of the men had thoughtfully brought their musical instruments along. Three had banjos, and two had guitars. Some evenings after supper was over, Nick would open a jug and pass it while they were seated around the camp fire. After the jug went around twice, those who were musically inclined and liked to sing, would furnish entertainment for all.

The wagon train had passed through mountainous regions and many miles of fine forests in Tennessee and Arkansas but after crossing the wide Mississippi river, the scenery was not like any the men had ever seen; instead of mountains, forests, and streams, there were miles of treeless plains and prairie land covered with coarse grass. Much of the Oklahoma and Texas Territory was like this.

Usually a full day would be spent in the towns where Nick ordered a stop to replenish the provisions. These stops would allow the mules a good rest from their laborious burden.

In some places along the route, the men saw crude graves covered with field stone and a decaying wooden marker instead of a head stone. Near some of the graves would be the bleached skeletons of cattle, mules or horses; old wheels and parts of rotting wagons; a grim reminder of some unfortunate traveler. The cause of these deaths could have been one of several, such as hunger, sickness, thirst, bandits or Indians.

Nick knew that the long journey would soon be over as his wagons approached the little town of Oro Vista, where he planned to buy fresh supplies. After the necessary provisions were purchased and loaded on the wagons, Nick went to the Cantina where he knew most of the men of his wagon train would be. The bartenders were the best informed people in these little towns, Nick had already learned. Some of the men from the wagon train were already drinking Tequila as Nick walked in. This beverage was something new to all of the Carolina wagoners. Nick tried a small glass of the fiery, potent Mexican liquor after one of his friends insisted.

"How far to Paso del Norte?" Nick asked the bartender.

"One hundred and thirty miles," answered the bartender.

"Not as far as I thought," remarked Nick.

As the wagon train left Oro Vista, some of the Mexican people who had profited from its halt, waved cheerfully and said, "Adios Amigo." Some of the merchants charged exorbitant prices for supplies to the wagon trains which passed through their towns. Around the camp fire that evening, Nick told the men that Santa Anna would probably contact them soon. Early the next morning the wagon train proceeded South as usual. Around noon the wagoners noticed three riders approaching the wagon train. As they came nearer, Nick could see with his field glasses that they were wearing military uniforms. Nick halted the wagons.

"I think perhaps these are three of Santa Anna's scouts who were sent to contact us," he told the wagoners.

The riders in Mexican cavalry uniforms rode to the front of the train where Nick was. "Are you Senor Arrington who the Presidente is expecting?" "Yes!" Nick nodded as he spoke.

"Then we will lead you to his camp if you will follow, it is not far, Senor Arrington."

The scout spoke very good English, thought Nick.

"Very well, we will follow you," Nick answered.

The Cavalrymen led the wagon train over several miles of rolling terrain; green with a growth of coarse prairie grass. Nick and his friends were pleased with

the camp site which Santa Anna had selected for this meeting. There were clusters of cottonwood trees growing near to supply them with fire wood, and there was enough water here for everyone and all of the livestock. They found that Santa Anna fit the general description that was so often given of him. He was small and short of stature, very neat and precise, and dressed in an immaculate manner. He demanded strict discipline from the officers and soldiers with him. Nick could easily understand why he had been successful as a General. He had courage, a hypnotic personality and liked to give orders; and he had a brilliant mind, conducive to military strategy.

Nick liked the arrogant Little Dictator which reminded him of a very small gamecock of Bantam breeding.

Santa Anna showed Nick and his friends as much hospitality as could be expected here on the plains of Northern Mexico. The Mexican Cavalrymen had brought live beef cattle with them and these were killed, dressed, and prepared by the army cooks. The Americans enjoyed these meals, although some thought the Mexican cooks were too generous about the seasoning with various spices, and peppers.

Nick and his friends cut poles from the cottonwood trees growing near; set them up to form a perfect circle, and drove them in the ground. Around these poles they stretched heavy thick canvas which

Santa Anna furnished from his Army supplies. A narrow opening was left for the referee and handlers to enter the enclosed circle with the gamecocks. Although there were no seats for the spectators, this improvised cockpit was very good. The canvas wall that enclosed the arena was about four feet high. The spectators could stand around the outside and look over the canvas wall. Nick and Santa Anna were both pleased with the spacious cockpit and its soft, springy earthen floor of the prairie. All grass was removed from the level enclosed circle and the poles which supported the canvas had been set with just a little slant, to give the spectators a better view of the fighting cocks at all times.

Nick and Santa Anna wrote the contract for the main together and both signed the agreement before several witnesses. Santa Anna could read and speak English very fluently and did not object to using the American gaffs which were described in the written agreement as—Any length round steel, sharp only on the point. Also specified in the contract was—No cock to weigh more than two ounces above its opponent. Give or take two ounces.

The Little Dictator and Nick together had more than six hundred gamecocks, and this was one of the largest mains ever fought in the western hemisphere and probably on either hemisphere. The largest stakes ever heard of, were bet on this main. The exact

amount of money put up on this main was never revealed, to prevent bandits from learning about it and attempting to rob them.

One thing all historians agree on is, that the money wagered on this cock main between the Dictator of Mexico and the vastly rich Nick Arrington of North Carolina would make any Eastern Potentate's eyes bulge to have seen it. Some historians say, the "Main Purse" was two large chests filled with money and even the side bets placed on each battle would make most men wilt.

Nick had often found it difficult to get a large wager covered or called, but the Little Dictator did not quibble about the amount of the "Main Purse" or the side bets on each battle; always cheerfully agreeing to the amount of money Nick wanted to wager.

Some of Santa Anna's Mexican friends and Army Officers were apparently "well heeled" and would bet heavy on the Spanish Blues owned by the Dictator. These bets were quickly covered by the cockers and wagoners who came with Nick. Much of the money that changed hands was of gold coins, but it made no difference to anyone here, what form the money was in; they all knew the exchange value of the American dollar and the Mexican peso. Many of the merchants in the territory would readily accept Mexican money and the U. S. currency was good anywhere, or

if one desired he could always find an Exchange in most of the towns of Mexico or the territory.

Nick and his friends learned much of Mexican life while they were guests of Santa Anna at this camp. With the Mexican people, cockfighting is a ritual and is performed in a ceremonious manner which adds dignity and formality to the sport. The Mexican people never hurry and do not fight one pair after another as rapidly as the American people. Time is the last thing a Mexican will think of when he is at a cockfight. It makes no difference to them if there are six or eight cocks to be fought or a hundred, there is no hurry, and each pair of cocks fought, is a kind of ritual or ceremony which enhances the sport. One thing they like at their cockfights is music between each battle. Santa Anna ordered an open wagon rolled near the cockpit for seven of his musicians to sit in during the fights. The folding camp chairs placed in the wagon not only provided seats for the musicians but gave them an excellent view of all the fights. Immediately after a fight was over, the musicians began playing and would play for about five minutes.

The Little Dictator heeled and handled his own birds, and so did Nick. Santa Anna and his assistants were very slow about heeling and bringing in another cock; when he did appear, he would weigh his bird again at the pit side scales, then enter the arena and parade very slowly around the interior of the

cockpit talking with the spectators and holding the cock so everyone outside the cockpit could see him. He cheerfully answered all questions in Spanish or English about the weight, condition, or breeding as he gently stroked his bird from the neck to the long sickle feathers.

After walking slowly around the inside wall of the cockpit three times, he would turn toward Nick and ask, "Are you ready, Senor Arrington?" Nick with patience exhausted would quickly answer, "Yes, General." He always addressed the Presidente de Mexico as General to which Santa Anna apparently did not object. From the first day of their meeting he had reminded Nick of a Military leader more than a politician and he had first heard of Santa Anna as a General. Each day the fighting would begin shortly after sunrise and last until noon. As soon as the Mexican people were filled with the hot spicy Mexican food at noon they would find a spot to relax; after a smoke they would take a long nap. Some of the common soldiers with the Dictator would sprawl in any convenient place for their nap, under the wagons and under the cottonwood trees growing near.

Although the Mexican people are passionately fond of cockfighting, they would not go back to the cockpit until after they had their siesta. When Nick mentioned returning to the cockpit immediately after the noon meal, Santa Anna replied, "No, No, Senor

Arrington it is siesta time now, about three will be soon enough to continue the fights, and it will be cooler then too." No one stirred during siesta and the camp would be very quiet until about three P.M. when the camp would come to life and all would crowd around the cockpit again until sundown.

Some of the long drag fights would last for over an hour, but many of the battles would be over in thirty minutes or less. When the main was almost over, the Quarter Master Officer took several of the Army wagons to Oro Vista, the nearest town, to purchase supplies.

Nick won the great main and he and the Dictator fought their remaining fresh cocks in hack fights, and a few of the cocks which had been used in the main were fought again in the hacks. Some of these cocks used in the main had won a quick fight without receiving any injury at all. The Little Dictator regained a small portion of his losses during the hacks, but a fabulous fortune had already changed hands when he lost the main.

The North Carolina men spent over two weeks in the Dictator's camp as his guests. Perhaps this great cock match would have been finished in less time had it been fought in the States, with no music between battles, no ceremonies or formality, and no Siestas; but the Mexican people had added something beautiful and dignified with their slow manners and formal performances at the fights.

Weight in Gold

The cocky little "Napoleon of The West" took his losses like a good sport and shook hands with Senor Arrington after the last pair of cocks were fought. A very large amount of money had changed hands at this cock match, but what hurt Santa Anna most, was the defeat of his Spanish Blue fowl. The Dictator could afford the huge sum Senor Arrington had won honestly with splendid gamecocks. He liked Senor Arrington and admired him and the fine cocks he bred. There was something very much alike, about him and Senor Arrington; and that was, they both liked game fowl, and were very fond of fighting cocks.

Some of the cock stalls had been taken out of the wagons and placed near the cockpit during the main. After congratulating Nick on his sportsmanship and fine birds, Santa Anna walked to one of the stalls and paused. "Senor Arrington, you have a cock I want, and I will pay whatever you ask for him. This one here is my ideal cock; what I call a perfect cock."

"He is not for sale General, at any price," Nick said. "He killed two good cocks before I met you, and has killed two of your best, without getting any serious injury; I want to keep him for a brood cock." Santa Anna gave an order to two of his Aide-de-camp

officers in Spanish. They both walked quickly toward the guards who stood near Santa Anna's tent. The Presidente then opened the stall and took out the bird he liked. "What is his weight, Senor Arrington?" asked Santa Anna, carrying the cock to the scales a few feet away. "I believe he is about six pounds and three ounces, General, don't you remember his weight?" asked Nick.

The two Aide-de-camp officers returned with a small strong box. Santa Anna ordered them to place the small, but heavy strong box near the scales. He then took a key from his coat pocket and handed it to one of the officers; ordering him to open the strong box.

Santa Anna stroked the cock gently and set him on the scales. "Hand me some of the gold coins," he said in Spanish.

"More," he ordered the Aide-de-camp.

Nick stood near watching Santa Anna, and realized what he was doing as the Presidente kept adding a stack of gold coins to the scales. When the scales tipped and balanced, Santa Anna turned to Nick and said, "Now can I have the magnificent one, Senor Arrington?" A very determined person thought Nick, as he gazed at the stacks of yellow coins. Nick had heard of the Maharajas of India trying to purchase the famed Sonatawal fighting cocks with their weight

in gold, but here before his eyes was the Mexican Dictator offering him the cock's weight in gold coins.

"You will soon have as good cocks as I have if you get him, General," said Nick, knowing Santa Anna wanted to use the cock for breeding.

"No, no, Senor Arrington, only part of your chickens, you did not bring any hens with you," Santa Anna said.

"I have never sold any of my chickens, but I am going to let you have him, General," said Nick, eyeing the gold on the scales again.

Santa Anna left the gold coins stacked on the scales; locked the strong box and ordered the two officers to return it to his tent. He then walked toward his quarters where his remaining gamecocks were cooped, stroking his prize bird gently as he walked. Most of his cock stalls were now empty.

The Disappointed Texans

Nick and his Carolina friends began preparing for the long journey back home and said adios to Santa Anna and his soldiers. Presidente Santa Anna could not leave the camp until his wagons returned from Oro Vista with fresh supplies; then he would head South toward Mexico City, to resume the affairs of Government. Before he was ready to start back, Nick presented Santa Anna with two more fine gamecocks, but they could not compare with the magnificent cock Santa Anna had recently obtained from him.

Santa Anna's supply wagons were visible as the North Carolina men took their seats and waited for Nick's order to start. With his field glasses, the Quarter Master officer in charge of the returning supply wagons could see that Nick was ready to leave the camp.

A rider was dispatched from the supply wagons and rode swiftly toward the camp with news of what they had heard in town. On reaching camp, he rode directly to Santa Anna, dismounted and saluted him and began talking rapidly in Spanish. As soon as the rider finished talking, Santa Anna walked toward Nick who was already mounted. In very fluent English, Santa Anna said, "Senor Arrington, some of the Texan citizens of Oro Vista know that you carry much

money and have planned to waylay you on your way home. Three of my men heard them plotting in the back room of a cantina in town; but do not worry, friend, the Texans will not attack you."

The little town of Oro Vista was populated with some Mexican people but most of its citizens were Americans. No one knew, why the town whose destiny was to become a ghost town later, had a Spanish name.

Among those who waited for Nick where the terrain was rocky, were the elite of Oro Vista, supposedly the town's best citizens. However, they were not above robbery when a huge amount of money could be gained. They knew Nick's wagons would pass along this route, where huge boulders lined both sides of the road. The Texans waited patiently, anticipating the money they would take from Nick Arrington. Some visualized and talked of what they would buy with Nick's gold.

Of course, the North Carolinians were well armed and would probably show fight, but they would be heavily outnumbered; the leading citizens of Oro Vista thought. The first view of Nick's wagon train was too far away for most of the Texans, but one of the men had brought along field glasses and studied the approaching wagons. It seemed that both sides of the wagons were flanked with mounted soldiers and so was the front and rear of the train.

The field glasses were passed around among the group. "Damn that Santa Anna!" exclaimed one, after the view became apparent that the wagon train was guarded by a large military escort. The Texans had not reckoned on Santa Anna protecting and guarding his opponent after losing one of the greatest cock matches ever fought, but these greedy and unscrupulous citizens did not know or understand game fowl men and the deep friendship which exists among them. The Texans remained hidden behind the large boulders as the wagons and proud, erect, cavalymen of Mexico rode by with a rumble and jingling spurs. It would be suicide to attempt a hold-up now. There were enough soldiers to completely surround their rocky hideout. They had never liked Santa Anna because he had outwitted the Texans several times previous to this; now they hated him more than ever.

Santa Anna had ordered the Officer in Charge to guard the wagon train all the way across Texas and further if Senor Arrington desired. Nick purchased a quantity of supplies and whiskey in one of the towns they passed through. Just before leaving Texas he made camp and gave a farewell party for the Mexican escort which lasted two days. Some of the soldiers could play the guitars which the Carolinians had, and some sang in Spanish. Several beef cattle were dressed and roasted, and all had a good time before saying, adios.

The Cock-Master from Georgia

Bradford Thompson, overseer and manager of a sugar plantation in Georgia, had not seen the owner for almost a year, but this time the owner had requested that he make a trip North and visit him. The year was 1835 and the latter part of January when Brad arrived at The Cedars. "I started up here as soon as I received your letter, Mr. Arrington; I left my brother John in charge of your place in Georgia," Brad said, as he shook hands with Nick.

"Very well, Brad, John will make a good overseer while you are away. I suppose you need a vacation, you have never had many. I wanted to see you, and thought you would enjoy a visit up here for awhile. I have agreed to fight a main in March against a combine in Virginia, would you like to go with me?" Nick asked.

"Yes, I would, Mr. Arrington, I brought twenty of my cocks up from Georgia with me; do you know anyone who would like to fight a small main for about a thousand dollars?" Brad asked.

"Yes, Captain Drake likes small mains, he lives about six miles from here. We can ride over to his place if you like," answered Nick.

Nick ordered the darkies to take care of the horses and remove the twenty gamecocks from the wagon and place them in the stalls in his cock house.

After breakfast the next morning Nick ordered Ben to hitch one of the horses to a buggy, and he and Brad called on Captain Robert Drake. Captain Drake and Nick were the best of friends and Drake was glad to see Nick as the buggy approached the Drake home. Nick introduced Brad to Captain Drake and soon the three were engrossed in a game fowl conversation.

Captain Drake was pleased with Brad's suggestion of a small main, and both he and Brad signed a written agreement for an eleven cock main, with Nick as a witness.

The main called for \$1,000.00 from each party for the "Main Stake" and \$100.00 per battle as side bets.

Match Eleven Cocks—Bottom weight to be 5:00 and top weight 6:04 give or take not more than two ounces.

Gaffs—Any length round steel, sharp only on the point.

Forfeit—Failure to show for any reason—\$300.00.

Place—Captain Drake's Plantation.

Date—February 15th, 1835 Start weighing in at 9:00 A.M.

When Brad and Nick started to leave, Captain Drake said, "If the weather is bad we will fight in the barn and if it is fair we will fight outdoors. I don't have a regular cockpit with seats for everybody, but the improvised cockpit is just as good for the participants."

On the way back to The Cedars, Brad said, "I like the weights mentioned in the contract, but I will put up all twenty of my cocks in the "keep" and the nine which don't "fall in" I will fight in hacks after the main," Nick answered. "You don't have much time to condition Brad; and Drake is hard to whip, you will need good cocks that are in good condition to win."

"My keep is short, I don't need a long conditioning period like some cockers use," replied Brad.

"You can use my cock house Brad; I have already picked up my cocks from their walks, which I will take to Virginia, but there are plenty of coops and stalls for your twenty cocks also."

For the next three weeks, Nick and Bradford Thompson spent a lot of time in the cock house together. Nick believed in a long "keep" and always selected his birds well in advance of a coming main, if possible. He always put up more birds than the main called for; sometimes twice the number to be matched in the main. Usually there would be several cocks which would not "pink up" and take their feed

and work correctly; these would be discarded and left behind, and he could always fight a number of cocks in hacks after the main. Nick had built a large cock house; for most of his mains called for a large number of cocks to be shown on each side. His greatest characteristic was doing things "in a big way." He made many of his mains with combines; for a group or combination of sportsmen were more likely to put up a larger "Main Stake" and quibble less about it than the one party opponent.

During this period of special feeding, working, massaging, and grooming gamecocks Nick learned very much from Brad that he had never heard or seen before. Although he had been lucky and victorious in all of his mains; no one ever learns everything about game fowl, thought Nick.

Brad taught Nick all of his "keep," what feeds produce quick energy; what would give them more stamina and endurance, and how he thought a cock should be worked and exercised.

By imparting this knowledge to Nick, Brad gained a friend for life. Nick often remarked to cockers later, that he considered Bradford Thompson the best feeder and conditioner he had ever known.

Nick's father had sent him to an exclusive boys school in England for two years, and on holidays and week-ends at every opportunity he would visit some

of the English cockers. He listened attentively to their conversations on feeding, conditioning, and the care of game fowl. The head master of the school, Dr. Samuel Hawkins was an ardent game fowl enthusiast and was well versed in the ancient English art of cocking in all phases. But none of the English cockmasters seemed to know as much as Brad about preparing cocks for battle, thought Nick. In aristocratic families, the art of cocking was considered a part of a young man's education.

February 15th, 1835 was a cold day but fair and sunny. Captain Drake had improvised a cockpit outdoors at his plantation and he and Brad started weighing in at the appointed time. They agreed to start with the bottom weight and show the heaviest pair of cocks last.

A surprising number of sports were present at this small main and some of them had brought cocks to fight in hacks after the main. Since early times and all during the Colonial period, cocking had been popular in Eastern North Carolina. Many of its settlers were of English descent and migrated from Virginia to this section of the Carolina colony.

Captain Drake had a full show of his French Demons; a glossy, shiny, solid black strain of game fowl said to have originated in France. Like "peas in a pod" their style of fighting and appearances were alike, and all were as black as Crows in color.

Brad had a mixed show of cocks, of unknown breeding, mostly red in plumage.

Captain Drake's hunting hounds barked excitedly at the assembly of strangers at the plantation, and the shrill crowing of the gamecocks on this clear, cold morning, filled the cockers with anticipation of the sport they had gathered to enjoy. At this main, the gamecocks were left in the carrying cases until they were weighed or matched to fight.

Captain Drake and his beautiful black cocks were a favorite with the spectators at the beginning of the main, but after seeing the condition of Brad's cocks they began betting on Thompson's reds. In this main, several of the battles went to long drag fights which lasted over an hour. The experienced cockers that were present could see that Brad Thompson had only mediocre birds; not once did he show an ace cock, but in these long drag fights, Brad would win. His cocks were game and he had them in fine condition; that much was certain. Several battles during the main looked as though Drake would sure win; then Brad's cock would seem to draw power from some reserve strength and shuffle a coup de grace for the French Demon.

With what appeared to be very ordinary gamecocks, Bradford Thompson won the main with a score of six; to Captain Drake's score of five, with his flashy black cocks.

Captain Drake congratulated Brad as soon as the main was over. "You sure had your birds in fine shape, Mr. Thompson. They proved that in the drag battles."

"I think good walks and good condition are important in a cockfight," answered Brad.

Several others shook hands with Brad and congratulated him. Some of these men knew, after seeing this main; that Bradford Thompson was a conditioner par excellence. With money and fine game fowl Brad Thompson could have gone far in the cocking world.

The hack fights began immediately after the main, and continued all afternoon. The last pair was fought at the close of the short winter day when the sun looked like a huge red ball that was slowly sinking in the West.

Main in Virginia

Nick was pleased to have Brad assist him in the cock house as he conditioned his string of Cripple Tonys for the main in Virginia. He knew that Brad had defeated Captain Drake's fine cocks solely by excellent condition, for Brad's cocks were very slow and were far from being ring Generals. Nick followed Brad's instructions to the letter; in feeding, exercise, and working the cocks.

The main was to be fought on March 21st, 1835 at the Surry cockpit in Surry county, Virginia; for a "Main Stake" of ten thousand dollars from each party and a \$250.00 side bet on each battle. In the Virginia Combine were Thomas Crandall, Col. Hiram Baxter, Sidney Whitmire, and Nathan Drewe. This main called for a show of thirty-five cocks to be matched, and Nick had put up seventy in the "keep" to select his show from.

Nick persuaded his friend Captain Drake, to go with him and Brad. The three of them with two wagons and sixty-five well conditioned Cripple Tony cocks, left The Cedars well in advance of the fighting date, to allow plenty of time to refresh the gamecocks from the trip after arriving at the Surry county cockpit.

Nick had discarded five of the birds he had in the "keep" because they did not take their work and feed properly. From the sixty-five he hauled; thirty-five would be matched in the main and the remaining thirty would be fought in hacks.

As soon as they arrived at the cockpit, the three men removed the birds from the stalls in the wagons, to the large stalls and coops built on the grounds to accommodate the cockers.

Each of the cocks was exercised and worked on one of the padded tables and then left to scratch in clean straw and rest in the sun coops.

The Virginia Combine did not haul their birds for a long distance to reach the cockpit. Col. Hiram Baxter's plantation was located in the Tidewater section of Surry county, and here the Combine cocks were conditioned. The short hauling distance, without any change of climate and confinement in small stalls, gave the Combine cocks some advantage. Nick fought a full show of his Cripple Tonys. The Virginia Combine had a mixed show of cocks, as each breeder in the group had selected his best birds for this main against Nick.

At this fight, Nick met his first tassel head gamecocks. All of the cocks furnished by Col. Hiram Baxter reminded Nick of some crested wild birds he had seen, for each one of the Baxter cocks had a tuft of

feathers on its head similar to that of a Blue Jay or Red Cardinal.

Although these tassel heads were extremely game, they did not appeal to Nick. They were not his idea of what a gamecock should be. They were stocky, short leg cocks of low station and carriage; and they were ground fighters that seldom flew high enough to top their adversary.

By arriving early at the cockpit and working each bird and then allowing time for them to rest, Nick managed to show a main of Cripple Tonys in excellent condition. The thirty cocks that did not "fall in" or make the weights in the main, were matched and fought in the hack fights which followed the main.

Needless to say, Nick defeated the Combine with a score of twenty battles won in the main and fifteen battles for the Virginia sportsmen. He returned to North Carolina with more than ten thousand dollars in winnings. Brad and Captain Drake also made this a profitable trip by betting on Nick's gamecocks. After a brief rest at The Cedars, Bradford Thompson returned to Georgia to resume his duties as overseer of Nick's sugar plantation.

Main in South Carolina

The Traveling Cocker and his friend, David McDaniel, enjoyed the scenery as the wagon rumbled slowly over the coastal region of the State. The climate here was nearly tropical and the lush growth of trees and vegetation, revealed that nature had been very lavish in this section of the country. On both sides of the road grew a variety of timber in abundance; Palmetto, Magnolia, and Live Oak. In the swampy areas Nick and Dave could see Cypress, Bay, and Gum trees growing in profusion. The crowing of fighting cocks joined in the noise made by the raucous call of Blue Jays and Crows.

In the wagon were thirty-six Cripple Tonys to be matched against the magnificent and arrogant gamecocks of the Palmetto State near Charleston, South Carolina. This would be a twenty-one cock main for twenty thousand dollars from each party as a "Main Stake" and a \$400.00 side bet on each battle.

Nick's opponents were Henry Rutledge and Charles Rhett; both of these gentlemen were wealthy and from fine old aristocratic families. Each owned a large plantation and grew vast crops of rice, as well as cotton on their coastal domains. Their game fowl was made by crossing the Earl of Derby and Lord Sefton fighting fowl, two of England's best strains.

Both Lord Sefton and the Earl of Derby were famous for their fine game fowl and race horses. These two noblemen of England, not only had the finest game fowl in all England, but also bred some of the best racing horses England has ever known. Either strain of these game fowl, the Lord Seftons or the Earl Derbys, were considered priceless by cockers everywhere.

Nick studiously gazed at the splendid cocks of "Royal breeding" which would soon be pitted against his Cripple Tonys.

These grand, beautiful birds of the South Carolina cockers come in varying shades of red, ranging from bright red to a very dark red. All of them had white legs with a few white feathers in wings and tail. The healthy excellent condition of the cocks made their plumage shine with a waxy, glossy brilliance.

Nick and David McDaniel knew that these birds would not be easy to defeat, this part of South Carolina with its great plantations was noted for fine fighting cocks. These gentlemen had carefully bred these cocks from ancient pure English game fowl. The original brood stock had come direct from England and their lineage or blood lines was unquestionable.

Dave assisted in "heeling" the Cripple Tonys by holding each bird, while Nick carefully "heeled" with his well balanced gaffs made from English steel.

In this hard fought main, no decision could be made until all twenty-one pair of cocks were fought. After twenty battles, the score was ten wins for Arrington and ten wins for Rutledge and Rhett. In the last battle of the main; a fast, aggressive, high flying Cripple Tony killed the South Carolina bird, giving Nick the main with a score of eleven battles won by Arrington and ten wins for the South Carolina sportsmen.

Nick always considered this twenty-one cock main against Rutledge and Rhett as being the nearest to defeat he ever experienced in a main. The remaining fifteen Cripple Tony cocks not used in the main, were fought in hack fights after the main was over.

Nick and his friend spent several days in the rice country as guests of these wealthy sporting gentlemen whose plantations were near Charleston. Staying awhile with Mr. Henry Rutledge and also at beautiful "Rhett Hall," the plantation home of Mr. Charles Rhett. Nick and Dave enjoyed the hospitality of these two gentlemen and thought the culinary skill of the darkies was very good at preparing Bluefish, oysters, clams, and shrimp which were plentiful in this coastal region of South Carolina.

Arrington Meets Virginia Combine Again

In 1837 the Virginia Combine challenged Nick to another thirty-five cock main, and this time made the main purse twenty thousand dollars from each side to attract the great Arrington. Sidney Whitmire, Thomas Crandall, Nathan Drewe and Col. Hiram Baxter put up five thousand dollars each and selected their ace cocks in another attempt to defeat the Traveling Cocker. The combine cocks were put in the "keep" for conditioning at Col. Baxter's plantation again.

Nick answered the challenge of these Virginia gentlemen; and in company with James Avent, again made the journey North to the Surry county cockpit with sixty Cripple Tonys loaded in two wagons. Thirty-five of these cocks were shown in the main and twenty-five were fought in hacks after the main.

In this main, Arrington defeated the Virginians again and returned to North Carolina with over twenty thousand dollars in winnings from this trip to Surry county, Virginia.

The fame of Nick Arrington had now spread to every corner of the cocking world. Cockers in every

State and territory of the U. S. had heard of the incomparable Arrington from Eastern North Carolina, who never objected to meeting them on their own soil in a main, for any amount of money they wished to wager. Latin America had also heard of the man who had defeated the Dictator of Mexico in the greatest cock main ever fought on the continent of North America.

A game fowl journal published in England, carried an article about Nick with this caption, "Descendant of English Nobility in America Has Many Cocking Victories." Underneath this heading was the account of several mains that Arrington had participated in, which described and set forth all the particulars of each main, such as dates, places, scores, amounts, and parties participating. The Game Fowl Journals published in England were always several months old before the subscribers in America received them. Opinions varied among cockers on why Nick was successful. Some said, it was the superb condition he always showed; with cocks in perfect feather, not an ounce of excess fat, and strong, with plenty of stamina and endurance. Others thought it was Nick's knowledge of breeding his invincible strain of Cripple Tonys, and some thought his success was due to a combination of both, fine gamecocks and the excellent condition of every bird he fought. A few looked upon Nick as a kind of wizard with game fowl and tried to buy his

gaffs. There was nothing unusual about his gaffs, except they were precise and well made by an expert gaff maker from the finest English steel, and were perfectly balanced. True, he had them specially made to suit the style of fighting of his fast shuffling, high flying, Cripple Tonys. But his gaffs were similar and looked very much like the "heels" of many other cockers. Certainly there was no magical power about his gaffs as a few superstitious men thought.

Nick Arrington never quibbled about the length gaffs his opponents used, because he knew what length heels his Cripple Tonys fought best in. If his opponent armed his cocks in gaffs which were too long to shuffle and accurately point with, it would be like a man going into battle with a spear which was too long, heavy, and awkward to handle with skill and speed. The man armed with the spear he could use with dexterity would most likely be the victor. Nick sometimes heeled his large, heavy cocks with longer gaffs than those used on the smaller, light weight birds.

The year of 1837 was a prosperous and happy one for Nick, with good crops and several successful mains, but best of all he and his wife Mary were blessed with a son which they had been wanting. They named their son John Gideon after Senator John Arrington.

Gathering from the Walks

In 1842 Nick received another crested letter from his friend Santa Anna, requesting that Senor Arrington meet him again in a large cock main. In 1836 his army had been victorious in the battle of The Alamo and had killed every man in the fort. After this happened his life would be in danger North of the Rio Grande among the Texans. But he would make the long trip from Mexico City to Louisiana if Senor Arrington would meet him at the plantation home of Senor Ramon de Barra on the West bank of the Mississippi River in the Pointe Coupee region of Louisiana. His friend Senor Ramon de Barra was the descendant of a Spanish Don and had visited relatives in Mexico several times. Santa Anna was well acquainted with Senor Barra and would receive a hearty welcome at the Louisiana plantation.

Nick thoughtfully reviewed the contents of the letter. If he accepted this challenge he would without doubt meet some of the same blood of his Cripple Tonys. During the years which had passed since the wagon train meeting, Santa Anna could have bred much of the Cripple Tony qualities in his Spanish Blues from the three fine cocks he had let the Dictator have.

Most of the rulers of Mexico were in power only a short while, usually only a year or two. Some were assassinated or dethroned by some General, who by Guerilla warfare took over the country. Santa Anna seemed to have a charmed life for escaping danger and was also very popular with the majority of the Mexican people. They now spoke of him as "Perpetual Dictator."

Nick spent more than an hour in reminiscence of his meeting with Santa Anna. He liked the brilliant and courageous little Dictator who so ardently liked cockfighting and would cover any wager, regardless of the amount.

Nick wrote his acceptance of the challenge, stating about what date he would arrive at the Barra home located on the West bank of the Mississippi river. His plans for this trip were to haul his cocks by wagons to Memphis, Tennessee and then charter a river steamboat for the rest of the journey to the Pointe Coupee region of Louisiana. The Barra plantation home on the river in this region was built by a Spanish Nobleman, Don Evariste de Barra. Spain once possessed the Louisiana territory and several vast land grants had been given to the great Spanish Dons. (see foot note)

The Barra home which the Spanish Don built is empty now, but is still standing in the Pointe Coupee region West of the river. The capricious river has destroyed most of the grove of large oaks in front of the house.

On the morning of the following day after mailing an answer to Santa Anna, Nick ordered Cripple Tony to put several of the penned stags in the carrying cases and load them on the buckboard. "Get the catch cock too," Nick ordered. Ben hitched a team of horses to the buckboard while Tony loaded it with cases of stags ready to go on walks. Tony brought the case containing the "catch cock" last. The "catch cock" was an old veteran of several victories in the cockpit and had been used as a brood cock when young. He now spent all his energy and strength crowing all day. This continual crowing made him useful as a "catch cock." "Dats de crowinest rooster I eber seed," Tony remarked. "He is just what we need to pick up the cocks on the walks, Tony," Nick answered.

"Yas suh, he shore is; he gentle, easy to hanel an not a bit man shy, Massa Nick."

The stags would crow occasionally as the buckboard rolled along the wide sandy road, but not as often as the catch cock.

"Turn left at the next road, Tony," ordered Nick.

"Yas suh." Tony pulled the team into a side road which led to a small house located about five hundred feet from the main road. At the back of the house was a dense growth of young Pine trees. Tony halted the horses in the back yard and Nick called, "Anybody home?" There was no answer. "Looks like they

are all gone, but we will pick up my cock anyway while we are here, and leave a stag in his place. I will see the people here later."

Tony climbed down from the buckboard seat and took the case which held the catch cock from the vehicle. He opened the case and gently took the veteran fighting cock out. Two of the stags crowed simultaneously and was followed by a lusty call from the catch cock Tony held. A shrill, piercing answer came from the dense Pine woods. Tony saw the cock on walk first, "Dere he come, Massa Nick." The cock walked proudly toward the buckboard with several hens following slowly behind him. When he reached the clearing at the edge of the woods he stopped and stood motionless with head held high as though listening for another call from the intruder of his private domain.

The brilliant plumaged gamecock shone like a jewel in the morning sunlight with a setting of forest green from the grass and pine trees about him, which enhanced his breathtaking beauty. "Shore am a mighty hansum fightin rooster, Massa Nick."

"Yes Tony, he is a beauty." The cock on walk flapped his wings and crowed vigorously, and the catch cock answered. The cock on walk moved rapidly toward the vehicle. "Hold the catch cock high, Tony," Nick ordered. Tauntingly, Tony held the catch cock in front of him at arms length. Both cocks

crowed again and raised their hackle feathers. Nick stood at Tony's side. The cock on walk sprang from the ground and flew up towards the catch cock. Nick quickly stepped from Tony's side and grabbed the cock while he was in the air. He then put him in a carrying case and released one of the stags to occupy his place on the walk.

The stag flapped his wings, then crowed, and started chasing the hens. Tony watched the stag drop a wing and dance around a hen, and then strut proudly into the woods with his harem of hens, like a drum Major on parade. "He will never leave those hens, Tony. There is not any other chickens nowhere near for him to take up with either," remarked Nick. "No suh, he neber leab dem hens, Massa Nick. Dis walk lot better fur him dan dat pin he been in. He git all de grass, bugs, an grasshoppers he want now, an lots ob grabble fur he crawl too." "Yes Tony, there is nothing like a good open, free range walk for a gamecock."

Nick and Cripple Tony left the narrow driveway and proceeded on down the main road to the next place about two miles away. "Dey is a good fightin rooster here, Massa Nick, he been on dis walk fur over a year now," Tony remarked, as he turned the team of horses on the road which would take them to the log house. Both Nick and Tony began looking for the cock on walk as they approached the house.

On one side of the house stood a small barn about two hundred feet away. "Whoa!" Tony halted the team between the dwelling and barn. Neither of the two had even a glimpse of the cock yet. Nick and Tony climbed down from the seat and Tony opened the case that held the catch cock and took him out. One of the stags crowed from the buckboard and a deep, throaty answer came from a cock in the barn. The catch cock crowed his challenge and out of the barn came a large Spangle cock running towards the buckboard. While he was yet fifteen feet from Tony he spied the catch cock Tony held, and rising from the ground flew at the veteran cock from that distance. Tony stepped backwards from this sudden and unexpected attack but was not quick enough to prevent the catch cock from being shuffled on. Two hackle feathers fell from the catch cock as the two men quickly made ready for another attack from the cock on walk. "Hold the catch cock high!" said Nick, now standing very close at Tony's side. The cock on walk flew again at the catch cock that Tony held in both hands with arms outstretched. Nick grabbed him while he was in the air near the catch cock. "Dat one shore fly high, Massa Nick, he mos too fas fur us to cotch." "He is a good cock Tony," Nick said, as he proudly put the aggressive gamecock in a carrying case.

"Did he hurt the catch cock?" Nick asked. "He git hurt in de neck some, but not bad, Massa Nick."

Nick left a stag each time he took up a cock from a walk. This same procedure was repeated at the next place that had a cock on walk.

Nick, with Tony's help, spent a number of days, gathering his best, mature two-year-old cocks to match against Santa Anna. These cocks would come from their walks wild, vicious and man shy. But after a few days of handling daily, massaging gently, and feeding them choice tid-bits of what they liked best, they would become very tame and gentle, easy to handle, and unafraid of man.



The River Cruise

After gathering his ace gamecocks from the walks, Nick contacted his friends who had been with him in Mexico during his first meeting with Santa Anna. Some of these same men agreed to go with him again on another great cock match. They had enjoyed the trip to Mexico with him and Nick always paid all expenses of those who went with him.

In February 1842 Nick's wagon train again headed West across North Carolina and most of Tennessee until they reached Memphis, Tennessee on the Mississippi river. Here he chartered the "Natchez Belle" and removed the cock stalls from the wagons to the river steamboat.

After the gamecocks and stalls were loaded on the steamboat, Nick made arrangements with a Memphis livery stable to take care of his mules and wagons until his return.

The Natchez Belle was not built in Natchez as could be expected from her name. She was built in Memphis, Tennessee and her home port was Memphis. When in need of repairs or paint she was always put

in dry dock at Memphis. Her owner, Christopher Bradley lived in Natchez and had christened her The Natchez Belle in honor of his home-town Natchez, Mississippi.

She was built to carry both cargo and passengers, and the staterooms, berths, and furnishings were so elegant and expensive that some spoke of her as a "floating palace." While aboard her a person could have almost every comfort and convenience he would find anywhere, and luxury too.

"Aye, Sir we know the Barra place well, they have their own dock for shipping cotton, sugar, and rice like many of the planters on the river. It is easy to make a landing there and we can tie the Natchez Belle up very close to the Barra home," replied Captain (Billy) William Mark to one of Nick's questions.

Captain Billy Mark was in command of the Natchez Belle and while he and Nick talked of the trip down the river, roustabouts were busy bringing sacks of sand and clay aboard to be used on the cockpit floor. "You wanted a place on the Natchez to fight cocks, Mr. Arrington; come, I will show you what we have ready for you." Captain Billy led the way to the elaborate and beautiful grand saloon of the Natchez Belle. The grand saloon of a river steamer was always the pride and joy of the Captain and the owner. The woodwork and stanchions of this

spacious main room were ornately hand carved and no expense had been spared in the decor.

Captain Billy pointed to a central space usually reserved for the performance of entertainers. Sometimes a bevy of dancing girls from New Orleans would make a trip up the river to Memphis and back, and perform here. This space had also served as a place for jugglers, comedians, and musicians.

A circular three foot high wooden wall, painted green, had been set up in this space generally used for shows. Inside the enclosed circle men were already tamping a mixture of clay and sand. "Tamp it lightly and don't make it too hard, leave it soft and spongy," ordered one of the officers to the roustabouts. "How do you like it, Mr. Arrington?" asked Captain Billy. "It is a very fine cockpit, but I didn't know it would be in here." "Don't worry, Mr. Arrington, the sand and clay will not damage the hardwood flooring beneath it. When you leave the Natchez Belle at Memphis, we will take the cockpit walls down and stow them away. Then we will heave the sand and clay over the side and polish and wax the hardwood floors. You chartered the Natchez Belle and she is your boat until we get back to Memphis."

Nick and his friends were delighted with the river steamer and the luxurious accommodations she had. Captain Billy seemed to know every prominent planter on both sides of the wide Mississippi. He

would point out the palatial mansions from the deck of the Natchez Belle and tell Nick who owned them. The front of the houses faced the river but the grove of trees which grew in front of some, would partially obstruct the view of their beauty.

As the steamboat carried them farther South, Nick noticed that this river land was not a wilderness of wild unsettled country. The Louisiana plantation houses on both sides of the river appeared to be fine and prosperous.

"Some of the best land in the country, and expensive and difficult to purchase too," Captain Billy said to Nick. "The fertility of this rich, black soil seems to be inexhaustible and they always produce good crops," he added.

One of the Barra negroes had reported a steamboat was slowly heading in towards the pier used for shipping cotton, sugar and rice. Those on the Natchez Belle could see a number of people gathered to welcome their arrival. As the steamboat moved nearer to the Barra dock, Nick could see his friend Santa Anna, the arrogant little Dictator of Mexico. Some of the Barra plantation negroes helped tie up the Natchez Belle at the pier. Nick first shook hands with Santa Anna and was then introduced to Ramon de Barra and the others who were gathered here at the steamboat landing.

Senor Ramon de Barra invited Nick and his friends to his home which stood only a short distance away with a grove of large oaks between the house and river. Most of the North Carolina men had never seen such a house as the Spanish Nobleman, Don Evariste de Barra had built here in this fertile river section of Louisiana.

After walking through the grove of huge oaks, Ramon de Barra escorted his guests from the front entrance to the courtyard at the rear of his home. At the front which faced the river were two porches, a lower and a balcony porch. The first story of the house was made of brick which was plastered over, and the round columns which supported the porch were also made of brick with a layer of concrete plaster over them.

The second story or upper half of the home was built of wood. Behind this front portion of the house was a large courtyard enclosed on each side by rooms on a ground level with the patio, and also rooms above with a balcony porch around them. The courtyard had a stairway leading up to the second floor rooms. This enclosed area was where the Barra family spent much of their time.

An octagon shaped dove cote stood near the rear entrance of the courtyard which sheltered Mrs. Barra's fancy, snow white pigeons. Mrs. Barra was of French descent. Spanish Dagger (yucca plants)

grew near the dove cote. Several stone benches and two tables for holding wine and refreshments were located on one side of the courtyard. In the center of the courtyard was a shallow concrete pool and near the front entrance was a sundial of highly polished marble. On all sides of the large patio were small palms, growing from the largest earthenware pots the North Carolina men had ever seen. A few potted flowering plants were set between the small palms. After a refreshing glass of wine in the courtyard Nick, Senor Barra, and Santa Anna walked back through the grove of oaks to the steamboat landing, and went aboard the Natchez Belle.

When the three men entered the grand saloon, Nick pointed to the cockpit. "What do you think of that, General?" "Very good, Senor Arrington, I will have my cocks brought aboard and we will use it."

All of the following day was spent in preparing for the main. The plantation darkies brought Santa Anna's cock stalls and gamecocks aboard and Nick and the Dictator drew up a main contract and signed it in the presence of several, who acted as witnesses.

Nick and Santa Anna were both surprised to see so many spectators assembled in the grand saloon of the steamboat at the start of the main. No effort had been made to spread the news of the main, but it appeared to have been widely circulated. Invitations had been sent to a few of the neighboring planters and

they had passed the word to others that the Peerless Nick Arrington of North Carolina was meeting the Dictator of Mexico in a large cock main for a fabulous fortune in gold. Some of those present had come with friends of the Barra family and did not have a formal invitation. Among the spectators was Paul Renault, a sportsman from New Orleans who was visiting relatives in the Pointe Coupee region when he heard of the great main of cocks to be fought here.

The Renault family were among the earliest French settlers of New Orleans and were widely known as successful wine merchants. Paul continued with the business of importing fine wines, which he had inherited; but also invested in other business ventures, especially hotels, bars, and eating establishments. His business judgment was so keen that after a few years he owned a chain of coffee houses, and cafes in New Orleans. He advertised his business by lavish forms of free entertainment and shows of various sorts. His favorite shows were spectacular displays of fireworks which he would purchase in large quantities and assortments and then invite the public free of charge. The firework shows were usually held at the edge of New Orleans, just outside the city limits. Paul Renault was successful in business and was considered very much of a sport in and around New Orleans as he always bet large sums of money on any sport or game of chance in which he participated.

He not only liked gamecocks and fast horses but often frequented the plush gaming establishments of the city and spent hours at roulette, dice or cards. At his country estate near New Orleans he bred a strain of white game fowl which he admired and often boasted of their fighting ability.

At the beginning of the main, Renault put his money on Santa Anna's blue cocks, but before the main was over, he was offering odds to anyone who would bet against the Cripple Tonys of Arrington, his favorites.

Nick noticed that Santa Anna still showed cocks with pigeon blue plumage, but they had been crossed with some new blood since their first meeting, he was sure. Their style of fighting had improved, and now they were more aggressive and faster.

Although Arrington may have met some of his own Cripple Tony blood in this last meeting with the Dictator, the Spanish Blues or Spanish Blue crosses were not good enough to defeat his Cripple Tonys. Nick defeated Santa Anna for the second time, here on the river steamboat in 1842. Some contemporary historians say that \$500,000 changed hands at this great cocking event between Nick Arrington and the Dictator of Mexico; while others claim the amount was nearer to a million dollars.

However, if we take the figures from either of these contemporary historians, one thing is certain;

this was the greatest cock match ever fought on U.S. soil.

Paul Renault and Nick had become well acquainted at intermissions during the long main with Santa Anna, and near the end of the main, Nick had verbally agreed to meet Renault in a main at New Orleans. Several hack fights followed the main; but they were few, because Arrington wanted to keep enough fresh cocks to make a main with Renault. The Dictator had better luck in the hack fights that followed, for Nick did not show his best cocks after winning the main.

Before Renault left the steamboat he and Nick drew up a written agreement for a main of forty-three cocks with a "Main Purse" of \$40,000 from each participant.

Nick did not like night fighting, but Renault had insisted that this main be fought at night and the "weighing in" to start at 8:00 P.M. Nick had agreed to this when he signed the contract.

Nick and his North Carolina friends were filled with anticipation at the thoughts of visiting New Orleans; each had heard of "The Paris of America" but none had ever been there. Those aboard the Natchez Belle waved farewell to the Barra family, and to Santa Anna and his military escort of officers as the plantation darkies cast off the heavy hemp lines which held the steamboat to the pier. Deck hands on the

Natchez Belle drew the lines in with a windlass, and Captain Billy set a course South for New Orleans as the steamboat left her mooring.

The North Carolinians had another view of fine plantations as they went down the river to New Orleans. When they reached the city, the Natchez Belle was tied up at the dock near Girod street. Some of the men with Nick were so eager to see New Orleans that they left the Natchez Belle as soon as the gangplank was put in place. "Be careful in this town, fellows, New Orleans is wild and rough," warned Captain Billy. Nick thought first of his gamecocks. If Renault wanted to fight at night, then his cocks would be fed and worked at night during the few nights left until the date of the main. He told Captain Billy his plans, and at dark Captain Billy ordered the lamps lit near the cock stalls. Nick selected the cocks he would show in the main against Renault and assisted by his old friend Captain Drake, they worked each cock a few minutes on the padded table which had been placed near the stalls. After each bird was given a short workout, the feed cups were filled at each stall and the lamps were left burning until the cocks had finished eating. By working and feeding after dark, Nick hoped to accustom the cocks to the lamp light, which they would fight under during the main against Renault.

After feeding his gamecocks Nick decided to see some of New Orleans at night and dressed in his best

clothes before leaving the steamboat. Horse drawn vehicles for hire were plentiful here in this city but when at home in North Carolina, Nick occasionally went for long walks about the plantation. This evening he decided to wander slowly over the city he had heard about so much. Some of the streets were so narrow that two horse drawn vehicles could not pass easily. New Orleans was just waking up and would not reach its peak of night life until after midnight. Nick strolled leisurely along the narrow streets of the oldest section of the city and down Royal street, one of the main thoroughfares, with shops filled with fine merchandise which came from all parts of the world. Most of these shops were already closed. He meandered down Burgundy, Dauphine, Chartres, Toulouse, Bourbon, Bienville, Dumaine and over to Rampart street. From the numerous bars and drinking establishments which he walked past he could hear the sound of music and laughter. Some of the women had a coarse, harsh laugh; like the laughter of men, while others reminded Nick very much of cackling hens. These people seemingly never knew sorrow or had a care or worry in their life.

On Iberville street and a part of Basin street he walked past the large, finely furnished bagnios of the city. On Iberville street these mansions of the demi-monde had very little front yard and stood very close to the street. As Nick strolled by these public harems,

the window tapping inside would draw his attention to the beckoning girls within. The luxurious houses along these streets were noted for their elegant, expensive furnishings and decor. Some featured erratic shows, and such oddities as mirror rooms, with walls and ceilings made entirely of mirrors. On Bourbon, Dauphine and Burgundy streets were the grand, expensively furnished gambling houses where as much as \$20,000 was often won and lost at one sitting of poker in the card rooms. But Nick did not enter any of these establishments as he rarely bet money except on the sport he liked best.

Most of the Carolina and Virginia sportsmen Nick had known were very conservative and seldom bet money on anything but gamecocks and horses. Even their wagers on these sports were usually limited, but here in Louisiana the "gambling fever" was stronger than anywhere in the U. S. during the 1800's. This "fever" held a firm grip on most of the wealthy and influential citizens in this prosperous Delta region. The Devons, the Renaults, the Claibornes and members of the great Marigny family of Louisiana, some of the wealthiest and most powerful families in the State were addicted to "Lady Luck."

Many fortunes changed hands in the 1800's as the result of gambling being a common pastime among the rich and great families in this portion of the U. S. These people not only bet on the animated sports of

cockfighting and horse racing but would place a wager on almost any game of chance. Professional gamblers and card sharps annually cheated the wealthy planters and business men out of fortunes. Some of the professional gamblers would ply their trade on the steamboats by enticing the gullible planters, merchants, and young plantation blades to a friendly game. After baiting his victim by dealing a few hands of poker and allowing him to win, the professional would raise the stakes and soon leave the gullible stranger with an empty purse.

Usually the gambler would be among the last to come aboard for a trip up the river to Memphis. He would wait until he thought nearly every berth had been sold, and when sure there would be a crowd of gullible suckers for him to work on, the flashy, elegantly dressed gentleman would purchase a ticket. Many of these professional gamblers were close friends of the steamboat Captains.

Wealth in many forms changed hands over the gaming tables in the 1800's. Chattel property of live stock, horses, slaves, carriages, entire cotton and sugar crops, stocks, and part interests in river steamboats. Real estate too often changed hands in the form of deeds to tracts of land and sometimes houses or a plantation. This was a period when gambling of nearly every kind was the main diversion of rich and influential gentlemen. Contemporary historians say

that idleness of the rich families caused this wave of gambling because they had nothing else to pass their time. Some think it due to the predominating influence of the pleasure loving French and Spanish of the Delta region.

Some of these river planters would think they had a very poor year if they did not clear a hundred thousand dollars on their crops. The fuel to operate their sugar mills cost them nothing except the labor of their slaves. A sugar mill burned several hundred cords of wood each season. Here, as in other parts of the South, the planters seemed to vie with each other and built pretentious, large homes of grandeur. Some made a lavish display of their wealth with knobs and door hinges made of solid silver in their palatial mansions.

Some ornamented their carriages and the harness of the carriage horses with solid silver. Much of the ladies wearing apparel was imported from the style centers of Europe. When members of a river planter's family made a trip up to Memphis to visit friends or relatives, a long retinue of slaves befitting an Eastern potentate followed them down to the steamboat landing carrying hat boxes, umbrellas, valises, trunks, satchels, and luggage of all sorts.

Several of the river plantations had their own race track for horse racing and cockpits built with seats for guests and spectators. The social events held

at the plantations were often very elaborate and expensive. The planter's children had a private tutor when small and some were later sent to Europe for two years to complete their education. Most of these wealthy planters were fond of entertaining and liked company. They showed a hospitality to all regardless of their social or financial standing, and especially liked guests who had traveled much and those who were well educated. Audubon, the naturalist and lover of wild birds, was very poor most of his life, but was a welcome guest at many of these fine plantation homes of Louisiana and the doors had also been open to the prosperous gentleman pirate, Jean Lafitte and his lieutenant Dominique You. The planters often bought pirate loot of fine merchandise and negroes from LaFitte at bargain prices. Dominique You stood high in Masonic circles and once held the highest Masonic chair in New Orleans. At his death he was buried with all the pomp and ceremony the Masonic order could show; and the stores of New Orleans closed on the day of his funeral.

During Nick's long walk over the colorful city, he paused only twice for refreshments. Once at the Absinthe House for a schooner of beer and once at the bar reputed to have once been the rendezvous of Jean LaFitte. When he wandered through Pirate Lane, Gallatin street, and down Girod street, he learned that what he had heard of New Orleans was true.

Never in his travels had he seen anything to compare with these streets. The wildest sections of London, Norfolk, Memphis, Charleston, or Savannah could be considered sober and sedate to these streets of New Orleans.

Every door along these streets was either the entrance to a bar, a barrel house, or the cribs of cheap prostitutes. These streets had a cosmopolitan air about them, for the girls in the cribs were of many nationalities; Portuguese, French, Spanish, Irish, English, Swedish, Norwegians, Belgians, Italian, and American girls from all parts of the U. S. The majority were those of French and Spanish descent and Americans from all States.

The cribs were small bedrooms; some furnished very plain and simple and others had the appearance of elegantly furnished boudoirs with embroidered bedspreads and walls adorned with colorful tapestry. When not entertaining a customer, the girls would open their front door near the sidewalk while clad in very brief attire, and stand in the door calling with loud solicitation to the men walking by. The loud music from the drinking establishments blended with gay laughter, and created a carefree atmosphere on these streets. The odor of fragrant perfume from the cribs, and the stench of beer and liquor from the bars, filled the air of this semi-tropical paradise of loose women.

Many of the boudoirs were brilliantly lit to display their attractive furnishings and look more enticing to men. Well dressed, elderly gentlemen paused at the doors of some of the cribs to chat with the girls and seemed to be well acquainted with them; knowing many of them by name. The girls standing or sitting in the crib doors could be heard as they called out to the men in a loud voice. "Hi, sailor boy, want a good time?" A French girl called to Nick "Come in, Monsieur, and have pleasure." One of Spanish descent called, "Good time cheap, Senor."

As Nick continued to saunter slowly by them without a pause, the more impudent girls tried to provoke him.

"What are you looking for, tall boy?" "When is your next sermon, Reverend?" "What more do you want, sport?" "Do you have all the street lamps lit, tall boy?" Each saucy remark was followed by peals of laughter from the girls. Nick hailed a hansom and rode back to where the Natchez Belle was docked.

As he retired, he thought of the city he had just viewed. Now he knew why it was called The Paris of America. He doubted very much if Paris or any other city anywhere, would be as licentious, and its demimondes as solicitous as here in New Orleans. He hoped his friends would get back safe, for some of those narrow dim lit streets would be dangerous to

walk at night, especially for a person who was imbibing to excess.

Gay, merry ,carefree, gaudy, bawdy, lusty, and much given to pleasure, was the New Orleans of the 1800's.

Fast town, maybe too fast, thought Nick. Some of the quick tempered rich young Creoles would hardly reach manhood before they would be slain in the duello. For some would request a duel at the slightest reason or excuse. Perhaps in a few hours, some would meet at dawn under the large dueling oaks at the edge of the city, to settle some minor offense with pistols, rapiers, or broadswords. An offense for dueling could originate easily anywhere; in a cafe, a coffee house, a bar, a dance, a ballroom, or almost any place over the slightest provocation or disagreement. Fencing Masters from Europe did a thriving business in New Orleans by teaching the sons of wealthy Creoles the art of fencing with swords, and the use of other weapons most commonly used in dueling.

Members of many prominent, wealthy families were duelists and had engaged in duels. The graves of those who lost while dueling were marked,—Slain in the duello or Slain on the field of honor, in a duel. Among the proud aristocratic Creoles it was generally considered cowardly and disgraceful not to accept a challenge to a duel from a gentleman.

Nick was glad he had seen some of New Orleans at night, without becoming a part of it. Many of the inhabitants here would not retire until dawn and would sleep until afternoon. Just before falling asleep, he thought of The Cedars, his home in North Carolina; his wife Mary, and his children, John Gideon, Anna and Rebecca.

He did not sleep long, and from habit arose early as usual. After dressing and bathing his face and hands, Nick left his stateroom. Entering the dining room he walked to the Captain's table and sat down. Captain Billy entered the dining room as soon as Nick was seated, and sat down at the table with Nick.

"What do you think of the city, Mr. Arrington?" Captain Billy inquired. "New Orleans is all that people say it is, Captain, it is a fast town. I have never seen any place like it," answered Nick.

"I will feel relieved of a heavy responsibility when the money you have locked in the safe is back in your hands at Memphis, Mr. Arrington. You have enough money aboard in the vault to attract a large gang of ruffians. I hope there are not too many people here in New Orleans who know about it," remarked Captain Billy. Nick did not answer the Captain, he had always been lucky and only one attempt had ever been made to rob him, and it had failed.

After breakfast, Nick looked at his gamecocks to see that each cock in this warm Louisiana climate had a cup of fresh, clean water.

Paul Renault had friends from all walks of life and had invited many of them to the cocking main between Arrington and him. On the night of the main, the grand saloon of the Natchez Belle was crowded with an unusual assembly of spectators. Nick could easily discern the professional gamblers by their well tailored dark coats and trousers, white shirts, narrow black bow ties and gayly colored vests with ornate fancy buttons. There was no doubt, they were the best dressed men among this assembly. But Nick thought they were over dressed and too flashy and ornate with their large gold watches and heavy gold watch chains swinging across their brilliant colored vests. Some wore large stick pins in their shirt fronts or bow tie, and sported several diamond rings on each hand. Some of these gamblers were keen judges of a fighting cock, but many of them were not true sportsmen, and had only a monetary interest in the sport. These fellows rode the river steamboats and frequented any place where money would likely be wagered, and they were not adverse to playing the other man's game; even when they knew nothing about it. Several of these professional gamblers had brought along their consorts, which were women of the demimonde; and they too were decked in the finery and ornaments that was typical of their class.

One thing was certain, Renault had friends and acquaintances of every sort. Among the spectators

were also merchants, planters, business men, doctors, attorneys, young Creole plantation blades and several young and beautiful belles who had slipped away from the watchful eyes of their chaperon, by making an excuse to spend the evening with some neighbor-girl friend.

The flickering lamps in the main room of the river steamboat cast a lurid light over this colorful assembly. One thing they all had in common was a concern in the competitive sport they would soon witness. The cockpit was better illuminated than any other part of the grand saloon for this area was always used for entertainment, and for shows. Before the main started Renault introduced Nick to a number of his friends. Included in these introductions was Judge Claiborne who owned a large plantation North of New Orleans where he bred both gamecocks and race horses. Judge Claiborne was from a notable old aristocratic Louisiana family which was very active in politics. A Claiborne of this family had been the first American Governor of Louisiana.

Judge Claiborne was well known for his stable of fine race horses and his strain of game fowl. His gamecocks were known as "Claibornes" and they were famous all over Louisiana and most of Mississippi as birds extremely difficult to defeat. The Claiborne fowl were also very beautiful; the hens came in shades of wheaten color ranging from tan to light

brown. The cocks were of a brilliant bright red plumage with white in tail and wings.

Nick was introduced to several other prominent sportsmen who were friends of Renault, and also met members of the Renault family. When the main started, friends of Renault proved their faith in the cocks of solid snow white plumage he showed, by making bets of sizable sums on them, and to the satisfaction of the North Carolinians who had come with Nick, they continued to bet against the Cripple Tonys even after the majority of the snow white birds lost. The North Carolinians quickly called every wager against the Arrington cocks.

The white cocks of Renault were smart and displayed much finesse during the battles by making fallacious feints, and they often side-stepped the fast, furious charges of Arrington's aggressive cocks. The steel gaffs worn by these beautiful feathered gladiators in battle, resembled miniature bayonets or rapiers, and the speed of their shuffling feet and leg movements, fascinated those who watched these combats under the flickering lamps of the Natchez Belle. These proud birds were deep game and would take death, rather than yield to their opponent. Still struggling, they faced their enemy while gasping their last breath; seemingly victorious even in death. They did not accept defeat and their valiant spirit remained unbroken while dying.

Although elusive and skillful in battle, the dead-game cocks of Renault did not have the strength, or the power of endurance in the long drag fights of the main. They seemed to slow and weaken in every battle which lasted over thirty minutes, and were not good enough to win twenty-two of the battles in this forty-three cock main. Nick won the main against Renault with a score of twenty-four victories, out of the forty-three pair of cocks fought.

Nick had now become so famous and widely known to the cocking world, that every cocker of wealth who owned fine gamecocks dreamed of defeating him. To win a main from the great Nick Arrington would be a feat which would make any game fowl man very proud, and any strain of fighting cocks that could accomplish this would be renowned and in much demand by cockers everywhere.

After this main against Renault, Nick was approached by Judge Claiborne of Northern Louisiana who wanted to put up \$30,000 on a main of his flame-red Claibornes against Arrington's Cripple Tonys.

Arrington now had only a few fresh cocks left that had not been fought. The majority of the cocks he had brought from North Carolina had already been fought against Santa Anna's Blues before he met Renault. He did not expect to meet anyone on this river cruise but the Mexican Dictator. Nevertheless, he and Judge Claiborne drew up, and signed, a contract

for a twenty-one cock main, with a purse of \$30,000 from each participant, to be fought at Vicksburg, Mississippi aboard the Natchez Belle.

To show twenty-one ace cocks for this main, it was necessary for Nick to draw several cocks from those which had already been fought while with the Dictator. He carefully selected those which had won a quick fight, and had not been seriously injured.

Judge Claiborne owned some property in the Southern portion of Louisiana, but his plantation home was in Claiborne Parish, Northern Louisiana. Vicksburg, Mississippi was built on the East side of the Mississippi river. The river here served as a State boundary line and directly West, across the river from Vicksburg was the Northern portion of Louisiana.

The Natchez Belle left the pier at New Orleans and headed North up the wide river to Vicksburg, as Nick and his friend Captain Robert Drake began conditioning the Cripple Tonys to meet Judge Claiborne and his flame-red "Claibornes."

Nick was glad that this main would not be another night fight under lamp light, for neither he nor Judge Claiborne liked night fighting. In this "keep" Nick and Drake spent more time with the birds which had already been fought, than they did with the fresh cocks. Nick did not doubt that Claiborne would show

cocks from good, free range walks, in excellent condition; and he remembered what Bradford Thompson had said to him. "Nick always give them plenty of wing work. A cock scratches, walks, and runs a lot, and will develop good legs from this, but you don't see him using his wings so often. He needs those wings to break high, and top his opponent.

Nick preferred a long conditioning period, but the date of the main with Claiborne was so near, it prevented him from following his usual "keep" for getting his cocks ready for battle.

He reduced the feet and leg work, and increased the wing work of his cocks, by repeatedly tossing them towards the padded table, in an upward motion causing the cocks to fly and alight on the soft, springy padding. He had much faith in Brad's knowledge of gamecocks; especially his short keep. He also followed Brad's instructions to the letter on feeding; while preparing to meet Judge Claiborne.

The twenty-one cock main at Vicksburg was a daylight meet and did not attract so many flashily attired professional gamblers and women of the demi-monde, as the main in New Orleans had. Here the crowd of spectators was more sedate and less gaudy. Among the friends of Judge Claiborne were dignified gentlemen planters, politicians, merchants, doctors, cotton brokers, attorneys, and a number of young

people; some who would witness their first cockfight at this main.

Judge Claiborne was a dignified and very distinguished gentleman, in both appearance and reality; and he was well liked by the Louisiana and Mississippi sports gathered here to see his cocks in action. Judge Claiborne was assisted at this main by James Sanford. James Sanford was Judge Claiborne's helper and always helped condition the flame-red Claibornes for battle and assisted the Judge in "heeling" the cocks at the pit. (see foot note)

Sanford also helped train the race horses at the Judge's plantation. Before the main started, the Judge introduced James Sanford and several others to Nick.

The sports of the deep South backed the Claiborne cocks with large wagers at the start of the main and showed their esteem of Judge Claiborne and his fowl in both words and action. Their betting continued throughout the main, but the size of their bets diminished towards the end, as the Cripple Tonys won several battles consecutively. The final score of the main, was thirteen victories for Arrington and eight for Judge Claiborne.

The bright red Everette Claibornes are still bred and fought, and are popular in some parts of the U. S.

Judge Claiborne invited Nick and his friends to his home after the main, but the majority of the men from North Carolina wanted to start on the return trip to their own homes.

With some feeling of regret, Nick said farewell to Captain Billy at Memphis just before starting his wagons rolling East towards Nash county, North Carolina. This had been a very profitable journey for all of them as well as a delightful adventure. Those who accompanied Nick, were returning to North Carolina with fat purses, for each had placed money on the Cripple Tonys of Arrington. Arrington did not know at this time, that most of the huge fortune he carried, would later go into worthless Confederate paper currency to aid the Confederacy in the War between the States.

Main in Georgia

John Gideon Arrington was now seventeen and had many of his father's characteristics, but differed in one way from the healthy, robust Arrington men. Gid, as he was usually called, never enjoyed the superb healthiness which his father was blessed with; and had always been frail, puny, and of delicate health. However, he had shown an interest in the sport that Nick liked, and had expressed his desire to accompany his father to a cock main to be fought at Macon, Georgia this Spring of 1854.

This was a fifteen cock main against the combine of Monroe Pickens of South Carolina and John Barclay of Georgia for a main purse of \$3,000.00 from each side, and \$250.00 per battle. Nick planned to visit his sugar plantation near Macon after the main and stay with Bradford Thompson, his overseer, for a few days. David McDaniel accompanied Nick and Gid to Macon, Georgia in 1854 and assisted Arrington with his show of Cripple Tonys.

The money put up at this main was not large, but nevertheless, the cockpit was crowded, for the Macon pit was one of the leading cockpits in the South and those participating in the main were widely known. The spectators were sure that this would be a cocking

event they would not want to miss. John Barclay was known all over Georgia as a breeder of fine game fowl and bred two families of fowl on his Georgia plantation, which he called the Barclay tassel heads, and the Barclay straight head fowl. Monroe Pickens of South Carolina bred a strain of old English red game fowl which were equally held in high esteem by cockers. Pickens was from the noted South Carolina Pickens family of Revolutionary War fame. Pickens county, South Carolina and also the town of Pickens, South Carolina was named for this family, and several members of the family were distinguished as orators, military leaders, politicians, and statesmen.

Nick's overseer, Bradford Thompson was among those assembled to witness the main. Nick had a full show of Cripple Tonys as usual. Pickens and Barclay showed a mixed main of cocks of Tassel Heads, Dark Reds, and Straight Heads of brown-red plumage.

This was a close fought main with scores about the same for each participating party, until the last three battles, which Arrington won; giving him the main with a score of nine victories out of the fifteen battles fought. Hack fights followed the main, in which cockers from several States matched and fought their cocks. Brad Thompson fought two of his well conditioned birds in the hacks; winning one battle and losing one.

Eight of the sports decided to fight a "Battle Royal" in which eight cocks of matching weight were heeled and released in the pit at the same time. Nick had never liked a Battle Royal and did not participate in this fight. Very often the cock which fought less than the others would win; which is what happened at this Battle Royal. One of these eight was very slow and less aggressive than the others. He loafed about the arena near the wall while the others stayed busy fighting. When the battle was almost over and only he and one other cock remained alive, he shuffled a long series of strokes on the remaining cock which had been very active and was "fought out" or exhausted.

After this loafer killed the tired, weak, remaining cock, the Battle Royal Purse went to the owner of this "loafer" which had done very little fighting but was the only living cock left in the cockpit.

Nick, Gid, and David McDaniel spent a week at the sugar plantation with Brad before starting home for North Carolina.

Arrington Meets John Stone

John Stone gave very little attention to his personal appearance and lived an austere life on his small farm near Marblehead, Massachusetts. The only luxury he ever owned or indulged in, was game fowl; and he seemed to value money for only one purpose; and that was to bet on his fighting cocks. Neighbors described him as being a stingy person and as uncouth as a bear in manners. John Stone never enjoyed much popularity among the sports and cockers who knew him, but nevertheless, all who had seen his cocks perform in the pit had a deep respect for his game fowl. No one was sure how "Ole John" had obtained two priceless strains of Irish game fowl from Lord Dundon's estate and the Doctor Sands estate near Cork, Ireland. Although crude and rough, John Stone knew the art of breeding game fowl, and by crossing these two dark Irish families of fowl with the bright red Claibornes he got from Louisiana, Stone had produced a wonderful fighting fowl which seemed to inherit all of the best qualities from each strain. With this three way cross he was successful in defeating some expert cockers in mains. But how did John Stone get these fine fowl? This was what puzzled most cockers. Neither Lord Dundon nor Doctor Sands of Ireland had ever been known to part with any

of these fowl at any price, although many had tried to obtain their fowl. Some said, two young Irish lads who worked on these estates, stole some of the fine fowl for John Stone, in exchange for passage to America, which Stone paid. Others said, the lads did not bring over mature grown fowl, but brought over only eggs or baby chicks from matings on the estates, and concealed these in their meager belongings for John Stone in America.

However, these priceless game fowl, said to be among the best in Ireland were now in the hands of "Ole John Stone" and were proving their superiority in every main he fought.

John Stone was very successful during the years of 1854 and 1855, with the strain of game fowl he had originated and developed from three breeds of fowl; the Claibornes from Louisiana, the Lord Dundons and the Doctor Sands fowl from Ireland. It took Stone about thirteen years to develop this strain of game fowl which he called, "John Stones" but some cockers insisted on calling them Marbleheads because they were first originated and bred in Marblehead, Massachusetts. The John Stone cocks were of a very dark red color, with some coming almost solid black. Some cockers spoke of them as Black-reds in color.

During the years of 1854 and 1855, Jack Sanders worked with John Stone as an assistant in every main Stone fought.

News of John Stone's victories in the cockpits, reached the Veteran Master cocker, Nick Arrington in North Carolina; and in 1856 Arrington invited Stone to show a main of "John Stones" against his Cripple Tonys for \$50,000 a side. John Stone was "well heeled" at this time, for he had consecutively defeated eleven or more prominent cockers in mains of sizable amounts, and to Nick's surprise, Stone accepted the challenge.

Arrington did not need to travel for a long distance to this main, because John Stone agreed to meet him at Wilmington, North Carolina. John Gideon Arrington and David McDaniel again accompanied Nick on this trip to Wilmington to meet Stone in a thirty-seven cock main for \$50,000 a side.

Some of those present had come from Virginia to see the main between Arrington and John Stone but most of the spectators at the Wilmington cockpit were North Carolinians. John Stone had a full show of his dark John Stones and was assisted by Jack Sanders. Arrington showed all Cripple Tonys and was assisted by David McDaniel. This main against Arrington was John Stone's "Waterloo." For two years he had defeated every cocker he met in mains with his Marble-head cocks; but the Cripple Tonys of Arrington, which were bred in the sunny South and had open, free range walks, were superior to any gamecocks he had ever met. Arrington defeated Stone by winning

twenty-three of the thirty-seven battles fought in the main. Hacks were fought after the main.

A few months later after meeting Arrington, John Stone was again defeated in a main by a Baltimore Maryland cocker, who fought a strain of game fowl known as the Wellslager Blues. Meeting defeat in two mains, so close together for large sums, seemed to end John Stone's cocking career. But he continued to breed his Black-red fowl for sale, and there was a demand for the John Stone game fowl. That grand old strain known as "Warhorses" which are still popular in the South today, are heavy with the blood of old John Stone's Marblehead birds.

South Carolina has often been called the Gamecock State and justly deserves this honor; for several fine strains of fighting fowl have originated there. Colonel Thomas G. Bacon of Edgefield, South Carolina originated the Warhorse fowl. Col. Bacon owned a very fine gamecock with plumage as black as a crow, except for the hackles which were lemon color. This magnificent specimen of fighting cock was very aggressive and had unusual speed. He would leave his score line like a flash when released by the handler, at the referee's command "pit." This cock with good legs and wings, high station, and excellent conformation, had won several hard fights against keen competition and looked very good to Col. Bacon's experienced eye.

John Stone of Marblehead sent the Colonel six of his best carefully selected hens, which cost Col. Bacon a good amount. The Colonel thought, if his glossy black cock with lemon hackles could produce a strain with speed and aggressiveness, he would have better game fowl than John Stone ever owned.

On his plantation at Edgefield, S. C. Colonel Bacon mated his shining black "pride and joy" over the six hens he obtained from John Stone. This cross "nicked" wonderfully, and produced the great Warhorse strain of South Carolina. Col. Bacon did not name this family of fighting fowl himself.

While fighting a main near his home he showed a cock which came from the first mating of the cross he had made. In the first pitting of this new cross bird, a spectator yelled, "Just look at that Warhorse." The name Warhorse sounded good to Col. Bacon and thereafter he called his game fowl "Bacon Warhorses."

The Warhorse gamecocks in their pristine purity, as Bacon bred them; will either come jet-black like the sire of this famous strain or show some very dark Mahogany red plumage, and lemon colored hackles will still appear on some of the cocks. These black and dark Mahogany reds with lemon hackles are very handsome gamecocks.

Santa Anna is not the only prominent Mexican who has been interested in U. S. cockers and their

game fowl. The Mexican Revolutionist leader, Pancho Villa, visited the Palmetto State of South Carolina a number of times; and usually stayed at the Hester plantation as a guest of Tobe Hester. Tobe Hester was an ardent cocker, and breeder of Warhorse fowl originated by Col. Bacon.

Amidst the ruins of Hester's plantation home today, there is still a large painting of a gamecock on the high ceiling of the main room of the house. This overhead painting is now somewhat faded, but is still beautiful and is done in natural colors by a game fowl artist.

On each visit to Tobe Hester's South Carolina plantation, Villa would bring a Mexican peon with him, and after selecting a large shipment of gamecocks, a freight car would be loaded at Hester's rail siding with these very dark plumaged gamecocks. The peon would ride in the rail car to care for the cocks, all the way to Mexico. As late as the turn of the century in the early 1900's Villa made purchases of car load shipments of South Carolina fighting fowl. Although a Revolutionist, Pancho Villa stood very high in Mexican politics at several periods of his turbulent life, and amassed great wealth. His true name was Doroteo Arango.

At a main he once attended near Charleston, South Carolina he would start making an offer to

purchase each victorious cock, before the owner carried the cock out of the arena. Villa would raise the offer so high, that he obtained most of the winning South Carolina birds to ship back to Mexico.

Nick Arrington never did meet a main of Warhorse fowl or the Roundheads of Louisiana and Mississippi which were bred and fought with success by William L. Allen and his brother. This smart, evasive, side-stepping strain of wonderful fowl originated in India and was first owned and fought by people of Royalty. English ship captains who docked their vessels at the ports of Charleston, S. C. and Boston, Mass. were the first to introduce these gamecocks of Royalty to America. The Roundheads have very little comb and very small heads. The cocks come bright red with black breasts and usually have one or two white feathers in wings and tail.

But neither the Warhorse nor the Roundhead had become popular and famous until after the Civil War. Nick Arrington died in 1865.

Main at Memphis

In 1857, Nick agreed to meet a combination of sportsmen at Memphis, Tennessee in a main for \$10,000 a side and \$500 on each battle. The members of the combine were—Tom Long of Cincinnati, Ohio, Tom Barnes of New Orleans, and Colonel James Sanford also of New Orleans.

Those who accompanied Nick to this main at Memphis were—Elijah Hilliard, Aaron Battle, James Avent, Capt. Robert Drake, John Gideon Arrington, and David McDaniel.

In 1857 many of the cockers were shipping their mains of cocks by rail. But for several reasons, Arrington preferred to haul gamecocks with wagons. He was then sure his cocks would be properly fed and watered and would arrive at the cockpit in good condition. Nick or his assistants, always gave the cocks enough work on the padded table to keep them from getting stiff and “coop stale” while in transit. When shipped by rail, the express depot where the birds would be left, was usually several miles from the designated cockpit, and the services of a dray would still be necessary to reach their final destination.

Nick's wagons followed the same route West to Memphis, as they had used on previous trips. The

wagon roads led them through miles of fine forests. Nick and his friends noticed the variety of huge trees which grew in abundance on both sides of the wagon roads. Before entering Tennessee they could see Cypress, Hemlock, Tall Forest Pine, Spruce, Oak, Scrub Pine, and Chestnut. The forests of Tennessee were similar to those of North Carolina, but seemed to have more Yellow Pine and Poplar, and less Cypress timber.

The shrill crowing of well conditioned gamecocks was a pleasing sound to Nick on this rainy day of the main. The rain had not dampened the courage of these lusty birds brought here to display their prowess in the supreme effort of their life. Only fifty percent of the total number of cocks brought, would be alive when this main and all the hacks were over.

Nick liked the cockpit at Memphis as he surveyed the soft sod, and spaciousness of the cockpit floor. There was plenty of room in this large pit for those frisky, high flyers of his; which would sometimes fly, shuffle, and roll all over the arena, with such rapidity that it was difficult for handlers and referee to keep out of their way while they were fighting. This was one of the oldest cockpits in the U. S. and many mains had been fought here. Cockers from Kentucky, Western cockers, and Northern cockers from Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois had met those from the deep South at this pit. The elite of the cocking fraternity had often assembled here at Memphis. Ten thousand a side and

five hundred per battle was not an unusual, large amount for a main here, but this main would attract a large crowd; already the seats were being filled, as Nick and the Combine weighed and matched thirty-three pair of cocks for this main. When the main started every seat was occupied and a number of cockers and spectators were standing. Some had made long journeys to see this main in which Nick Arrington and his Cripple Tonys would participate. Arrington showed all Cripple Tonys as usual.

The combine had a mixed main of cocks because each member had entered several of his best birds to compete with Arrington. The cocks from Tom Long of Cincinnati, Ohio were known as Black Hackles which come with white body, and hackles and tail of jet-black plumage. Tom Barnes of New Orleans called his buff colored cocks Yellow Hammers which ranged in color from a beautiful golden yellow to light tans. Colonel Sanford of New Orleans had red Claiborne crosses.

Col. James Sanford had come a long way since Nick had first met him in 1842, as Judge Claiborne's helper. This was the same Jim Sanford who was training horses and conditioning gamecocks for Judge Claiborne in Louisiana. He now owned a sizable plantation near New Orleans; had a number of negroes he had purchased in the slave marts and auctions of New Orleans, and had his own stable of fine

gamecocks. How he had acquired such a high sounding and honorary title as Colonel was a mystery, but even his associates, Barnes and Long, addressed him as Colonel Sanford. Sanford had obtained some of the best game fowl Judge Claiborne ever owned, and had crossed them with some unknown strain which no one seemed to know anything about, except that they were "Ring Generals" and could fight. This cross was successful, and Sanford continued to fight these bright red crosses as pure Claibornes. Some said, Sanford's rapid accumulation of wealth came from amateur cockers and beginners who knew very little about the art of cocking in all of its various phases. Others thought his sudden rise to success and wealth was because his mains were always fought against parties who owned inferior fighting fowl of poor quality and breeding. While some said, his fine home and plantation was won during a long sitting of poker from a Creole planter, who had a bad streak of luck. However, in fifteen years or less, Sanford had climbed to the summit of the ladder of success, and here at the Memphis cockpit, Nick met Colonel James Sanford, wealthy sportsman and gentleman planter, instead of Jim Sanford, Judge Claiborne's helper.

Such was the 1800's before the Civil War, when anyone with ambition and endeavor could find a way to succeed.

In the first nineteen battles of this thirty-three cock main, Nick thought the Combine would be very

difficult to defeat, for they had won ten fights to his nine, but in the last fourteen battles, it was decidedly clear that the "Old Master" cocker from North Carolina, had the condition on them. Several of these last fourteen battles went into long drag fights, where endurance and superb condition were the most important factor for victory. Nick won ten of the last fourteen fights, thus making the total score, nineteen battles for Arrington and fourteen for the Combine of Barnes, Long, and Col. Sanford. The North Carolinians who were present at this main were all in a cheerful, happy mood, for each of them had won money at the Memphis cockpit.

Nick always stated afterwards, that the secrets of conditioning which Bradford Thompson had imparted to him, were what won him this victory at Memphis, Tennessee.

John Gideon's Marriage

During the year of 1857, Gid made many trips to Nashville, North Carolina which was about ten miles from The Cedars. In a few months, the reason for his frequent visits became apparent to all who knew him.

Nineteen-year-old Margaret Stillwell was a very pretty and attractive girl. When in Nashville, Gid would spend several hours in company with Margaret and on Sunday afternoons the two lovers would go for a buggy ride, if the weather was suitable.

Hiram Stillwell, Margaret's father, was a harness maker and operated a small harness shop in Nashville. After about a year of courtship Gid and Margaret were married in the month of January 1858. Nick's wife Mary, would probably have been more pleased if Gid had married a girl from one of the more prominent families of this area; a Drake, a Battle, a Hilliard, or an Avent. But Nick did not object to this marriage in any way. Although "born in the purple" from one of the most aristocratic families in the South, Nick had always been of democratic mind and principles; believing in social equality for all deserving people, and besides after meeting Gid's wife, he had formed a very high opinion of her. Nick also liked Mr. Hiram Stillwell, the harness maker at Nashville.

Mr. Stillwell gave his daughter and son-in-law a surrey and two matching Bay mares with a set of red tinted harness, ornamented and studded with polished brass trim. This carriage with a fine team and fancy harness, was considered a handsome wedding gift to come from a man of moderate circumstances. The harness was a product of Mr. Stillwell's trade and handicraft.

Nick gave the couple a tract of land at Hilliardston, several negroes, some livestock, and money. The couple lived at The Cedars, while Nick set his artisan darkies to work hewing and dressing timber to build a house for John Gideon and his wife at Hilliardston, about two and a half miles from The Cedars. The interior finish and decorating was not complete until the latter part of 1859, when Gid and his wife Margaret moved in.

Heated debates on the Slavery question were now arising in Congress and a discordant feeling was developing between the Northern and Southern States.

The Decline of Southern Aristocracy

In 1860 Abe Lincoln was elected President, and like George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson, he too was fond of cockfighting; but this did not make him well liked in the South where the sport flourished. Back in the 1840's when he was a Congressman, he had introduced an Anti-slavery Bill to Congress, and this opposition and his radical views on slavery made him very unpopular in the South.

Shortly after he became President there was much talk of Secession from the Union by several Southern States. A relative of Nick Arrington; Archibald H. Arrington from Nash county, North Carolina was a United States Congressman at this time, and was enthusiastically in favor of North Carolina seceding from the Union.

Archibald was also an influential member of the Secession Convention when South Carolina became the first State to withdraw from the Union. After the Secession Convention, Archibald H. Arrington became a Congressman in the Confederate States of America with Jefferson Davis as President of the new Southern Government.

The Northern merchants with their trim sailing vessels, which were built in the New England States, had sent their Yankee Captains to the coast of Africa for ship loads of negroes, and had introduced, and carried on a thriving business in slaves with the agricultural South, which needed the negroes for cultivating the vast crops of cotton, tobacco, sugar, and rice. This traffic in Negroes was called Blackbirding. The ships and men engaged in this slave trade were known as Blackbirders, and the majority of these Blackbirders were Northerners.

But now the Northern Industrialists and Politicians alike, coveted the wealthy planters of the South, and listened with envy at the news from travelers, about the prosperity of these proud Southern gentlemen who had created an Aristocracy of their own in the sunny South. With slave labor they had built great palatial mansions from select, massive timber, hewn and dressed by their negroes. These Plantation Lords not only ruled their great domains with absolute, unquestionable authority, but also controlled the political affairs and governments of their States. Wealth from their vast crops of cotton, tobacco, sugar and rice, grown with slave labor, had made for them a life of ease, leisure and luxury. Their large retinue of slaves and grand scale of living, often surpassed the Royal families of Europe. The South was now considered the most prosperous section of the U. S.

The Arringtons were well represented in the Civil War. And why not? They had more to lose than most families. Negroes were not purchased cheaply, and much of their wealth was invested in slaves. And how could they grow their vast crops without their negroes?

Colonel William T. Arrington raised a Regiment in Nash county, North Carolina and a large part of this regiment died during the Seven Day Battle at Richmond, Virginia. The other Arringtons in the Civil War were—Captain Samuel Arrington, Colonel Solomon W. Arrington, Captain Nicholas W. Arrington and Congressman Archibald H. Arrington with the Confederate States Congress. Nicholas was given a Captaincy rating under Colonel William T. Arrington.

All of these men were closely related and not only gave their services but generously gave money, horses, mules, wagons, pigs, beef cattle, grain and other supplies to aid the Confederate Army. Many of the Arrington negroes would have gladly helped fight the Northern troops, and some asked their masters for permission to go to the battle fields with them.

But these gentlemen were too proud to pit their negroes against their Northern enemies, and no slaves were used to fight the Civil War.

Soldiers of the Regiment strutted proudly over the streets of Nashville, N. C. in their new Gray uniforms and acted more like children going on a picnic,

than men going to battle. All of them thought the war would soon be over, and seemed to think this was just a short joy-ride adventure which would certainly end in victory for the South.

John Gideon Arrington tried to join the Regiment under the command of Col. William T. Arrington but Dr. Horace Brown of Nashville, the officiating medical examiner, having been his Doctor and knowing Gid's medical history, turned him down in the physical check. This was very disappointing to Gid, and friends tried to cheer him by saying, he could be of service without going into battle. Nick encouraged his son by asking him to manage The Cedars and other property along with his own place in Hilliardston.

The long, hard struggle between the States was very different from what many had thought it would be. Both the North and South suffered many hardships, and both showed great courage and fought to the bitter end.

Colonel Solomon W. Arrington was placed in command of the 19th Regiment Confederate States Army and was killed June 9th, 1863.

Colonel William T. Arrington was placed in command of the 32nd Regiment Confederate States Army and was killed March 7th, 1864. Captain Samuel Arrington, in command of a Company known as The

Gramille Grays, survived the Civil War and lived until Sept. 8th, 1876.

Congressman Archibald H. Arrington, who had such an unusual political career, survived the War and lived until July 20th, 1872.

Captain Nicholas W. Arrington fought with the Nash county Regiment during the Seven Day Battle at Richmond, Virginia where a large part of the Regiment was slain. Nick was wounded in this battle and fell into the hands of the Union troops as a prisoner of war.

The Confederate Army was recruited and made up of high class gentlemen, and men of character and principle; while much of the Union Army was just the opposite, many of their recruits were men of the lowest order. Prisoners of war in some of the Union Army camps suffered many hardships. Nick received very little medical attention and barely enough food to keep him alive while being held by the Union forces.

In an exchange of prisoners between the Confederate and Union forces, Nick was fortunate enough to be among those who were exchanged. After a short while in a Confederate hospital Nick requested a leave to return to his home in North Carolina, and near the close of the Civil War, the request was granted.

In a weakened condition Captain Nicholas Williams Arrington returned to The Cedars, the place where he was born and had always liked.

The Last Fight

Nick never fully recuperated from the hardships he encountered during the Seven Day Battle at Richmond, Virginia where most of his company was lost. This battle, and the confinement in a Union prison camp had left him in poor physical condition. He had known most of the men in his company. They were all from Nash county. Doctor Brown from Nashville, came to The Cedars several times each week, trying to restore him to health. John Gideon spent more time now at The Cedars during his father's illness than he did at his own home in Hilliardston.

February 23, 1865 was a clear cold day. The bright sunlight shining in Nick's bedroom windows looked warm and deceiving to those inside. Aunt Basil came to the bedroom door and spoke, "Captain Drake to see you, Massa Nick." "Show him upstairs and tell Fred to bring up more fire wood." "Yas suh, Massa Nick," answered Aunt Basil. Aunt Basil went downstairs. "Massa Nick not feeling well, Captain, he want you to come upstairs." Captain Drake climbed the winding stairway with Aunt Basil close behind him. She pointed to Nick's bedroom and said, "Massa Nick in dat room, Captain."

Captain Drake entered the large room; greeted his friend, and inquired about his health. "I am not

improving very rapidly, Captain. Doc Brown don't let me get out often. He says I have a weak heart." "I hoped to find you in better condition today. I brought a cock I would like to match and fight," Captain Drake said.

What is his weight?" asked Nick with keen interest.

"He is six pounds and two ounces," said Captain Drake just as Fred entered with an arm load of firewood.

"Put some of that wood on the fire and find Cripple Tony and John Gideon and tell them both to come here." "Yas suh, Massa Nick," said Fred. "This six-two anything extra or something special?" asked Nick, continuing the conversation with interest.

"Yes, he is, Mr. Arrington, I have never fought a Mount Vernon Red and would like to know what this one can do when he meets fast company. As you probably already know, President Washington bred two strains of game fowl at Mount Vernon. Both of these strains were old English breeds. The grey fowl he called Mount Vernon Greys; the Red fowl he named Mount Vernon Reds. The Red fowl were his favorites. When President Washington died, the Barksdale family of Virginia came in possession of all the Red fowl. No one knows what happened to the Greys. The Barksdales have bred the Red fowl

straight and kept them pure just as George Washington had them.

About a year ago I managed, with money, friendship and persuasion to obtain a trio of Mount Vernon Reds from Sam Barksdale. I lost one of the hens, but from the remaining pair, I now have several fine pullets and stags. If this brood cock proves himself, I know the stags will be good."

John Gideon came into the room, and Nick asked. "Son, don't we have a good six-two near, that we could pick up at once? What was the Spangle cock you fought last month and liked so well?" "He fought at six-one and is still in one of the pens outside," Gid answered. "Captain has a six-two he wants to fight. Weigh the Spangle and see if we can match him," said Nick. "You sen fo me, Massa Nick?" asked Tony, hurriedly entering the room. "Yes, push all of the furniture against the wall and leave the center of the room clear."

"Yas suh, Massa Nick," said Tony, proceeding to obey his master. Gid helped Tony move some of the massive furniture. When the furniture had been moved against the walls of the spacious room; Gid went out after the Spangle cock. Nick then instructed Cripple Tony to go out to Captain Drake's carriage and bring in the fighting cock belonging to Captain Drake.

"Massa Nick, Doctor Brown say fo you not to git cited bout nothin, maybe dis be too much citmint for you," "Get out of here and do what you are told," Nick ordered sharply. "Yas suh, Massa Nick," said Tony, limping toward the door, fearing anger would excite his master more than the ensuing cockfight.

Tony returned in a few minutes with Captain Drake's bird in a basket-like carrying case. It took Gid awhile longer to get the Spangle cock and weigh him. "These soft carpets will sure help, we couldn't fight them on the hard floor," said Captain Drake.

Gid returned with the Spangle cradled on his left arm, and said, "He still weighs about the same, the scales balance right at six pounds and one ounce." "Give or take an ounce or two is always a good match," said Captain Drake. "What will we fight for, Mr. Arrington? Will a hundred dollars be enough?"

"Whatever you say, Captain Drake, yes a hundred is alright," said Nick, thinking how the War had diminished the cash of most Southern families, although many had retained their land holdings and some of their property. "Prop me up, Tony," said Nick. Gid helped Tony prop his father up on pillows in a sitting position. "You hold the Spangle son, while I "heel" him," said Nick to Gid. Captain Drake took the Red cock from the carrying case and held him so all present could view him. "Sure looks like an old English

Black Breasted Red," said Nick. "All of Washington's game fowl were from old English stock," Captain Drake said.

The Spangle cock belonging to Nick, had a lemon hackle, with a variety of colors over its body as though it had been sprayed with white, red, pigeon blue and black. Tony held the Red cock, while Captain Drake "heeled." When the birds were "heeled" Captain Drake and Gid introduced them in the center of the large room by permitting them to bill each other several times. When the birds were pitted, they both fought fast and furious.

Captain Drake handled well for a man of his age but the Mount Vernon Red did not get up or fly as high as the Spangle and seemed to lack the speed of the Spangle. The Spangle killed the Red in the ninth pitting. "You had a good bird, Captain Drake, he was just too slow and wouldn't shuffle while in the air. I believe all the old English fowl were ground fighters and seldom shuffled in the air," said Nick. "He was not good enough to win," said Drake, reaching in his pocket and bringing out a hundred dollars in gold coins which he placed on the small table near Nick's bed.

Aunt Basil entered the room with a bottle of medicine and a spoon in her hand. "It time fo yo medicine, Massa Nick." There was no answer from Nick, and Aunt Basil spoke again as she reached for his

wrist. There was no pulse. The master of The Cedars had seen his last fight. The excitement had been too much for his weak heart and physical condition.

Had the "Traveling Cocker" been granted a last request in life, it would probably have been just this—Make one more cock match before departing on that long journey from which there is no return.

Dropped Feathers

Nick's death was not a surprise to those who knew the condition of his health. Gid arranged the funeral and burial, as his father had requested. The Cedars had two small enclosed family burial plots and a huge slave cemetery. The first and earliest family cemetery had a low wall of field stone around it and contained the graves of Nicks father, mother, grandmother, grandfather, three of Nick's aunts and several other relatives who came from Virginia.

In 1840 Nick's Uncle, Senator John Arrington, thinking the small plot surrounded by field stone had become overcrowded, persuaded Nick to start a new family cemetery near the big mansion and build a concrete wall around it. Four years later, on April 27th, 1844 Senator John Arrington died at the age of eighty and was the first to be buried in the new family cemetery.

Nick had requested to be buried in the old cemetery near his grandfather, Arthur Arrington; knowing there was still space for several graves in the old plot. Three days after the burial, Gid called on a Nashville stone cutter and ordered a head stone for his father's grave.

The Cedars seemed very different now; the darkies were sad; and instead of laughter and happiness, they crooned mournful tunes in unison while at work. Nick had been a kind and good master, and they created a feeling of melancholy about the entire plantation. He had always looked well to their comfort and welfare. When one of them was sick or injured he had sent for his own physician, Dr. Horace Brown of Nashville, to come to The Cedars and treat them. To the older darkies he had always given a ration of smoking tobacco and whiskey, and all had been well fed and adequately clothed in winter.

Gid was a "chip off the old block" and had inherited many of his father's qualities. The darkies liked Gid, but no one could ever take Nick's place with them. As Cripple Tony had said when Nick died, "Massa Gid, you is zackly like yo daddy in some ways, but dey won't neber be a nudder Massa Nick." There was much mourning and grief about The Cedars after Nick died.

In the latter part of March, the stone cutter delivered the head stone for Nick's grave. The wagon approached the Arrington mansion by the sandy back road. Gid was looking over some of the March hatched baby chicks with Cripple Tony, when the stone cutter spoke, "Got your father's head stone, Mr. Arrington, you want it hauled to the cemetery?" "Yes,

the old cemetery," answered Gid. "Do you know where it is?" "Yes, sir," said the stone cutter.

"Alright, you go ahead and I will be over with two or three darkies soon."

"Massa Gid, I shore lack to see dat rock," said Tony. "Alright Tony, you can go over to the cemetery now," said Gid. The stone cutter sat contentedly smoking his pipe when Gid arrived with help. Gid looked at the stone cutter's work and was pleased. The Masonic emblem at the top was well done and so was his father's name; the dates 1806 - 1865, and the epitaph. When the stone was unloaded and erected properly on the grave, Tony asked, "Massa Gid, will you read what on dat head rock?" Gid slowly read the epitaph beneath the dates.

"He delighted in doing deeds of kindness to all; no one passed without recognition, no one ever appealed to him without consideration."

"Dem words shore do fit Massa Nick. Yas suh, Massa Nick shore was a good man, he want eberybody to git along fine. He loan and gib money to lot of folks too. I neber hear Massa Nick say nothin bad bout nobody in he life."

Contrary to what some people expected, Gid remained at his Hilliardston home and did not move in the big house at The Cedars. He expected the aftermath of war to be hard years and the price of cotton

to be very low. The war had caused cash to be very scarce in the South. Gid often thought of the trunks in the attic, filled with worthless Confederate money. The Southern planters had all tried to aid the cause by exchanging their gold and silver for Confederate paper money. Many had faith in the Army of the South and thought the money would always be good.

Archibald H. Arrington's political career had ended when the Civil War was over. He had been a member of the Confederate States Congress with Jefferson Davis during the Civil War. Archibald had always liked The Cedars and while visiting, he had often expressed his desire to live there.

Gid opened a general store in Hilliardston next to his home and permitted his relative Congressman Archibald H. Arrington to occupy the mansion of The Cedars. Some of the darkies remained at The Cedars with Archibald and some of them went with Gid; although free now to go anywhere they wished; many of them were still staying at the plantations where they were born. They still depended on their former masters to provide for them. Many regretted that the North had won the war. They had been comfortable and secure on the plantations; with their masters carrying all responsibilities and worry about their welfare; medical care, etc.

Cripple Tony and Aunt Basil were among those who went with John Gideon to Hilliardston.

Archibald H. Arrington lived at The Cedars seven years. He died July 20th, 1872, and was buried at The Cedars in the new family cemetery. He had experienced an unusual political career. He had been a member of The United States Congress in Washington, D.C. A member of the Secession Convention, and a Member of the Confederate States Congress during the Civil War. During the seven years he resided at The Cedars he made an effort to maintain and keep up the big mansion, but was never able to restore the place to its pre-Civil War glory.

Gid hauled the copper "still" from The Cedars to his place at Hilliardston, built another "still house" with a rectifying room, and a large storage room to age the distilled products. The general store he kept at Hilliardston was known as John's store but close friends and acquaintances usually addressed him as Gid. The darkies in the vicinity addressed him as Mr. John or Mr. Gid. Tony, Aunt Basil, and the others who lived at his place continued to call him Massa Gid, although Gid had repeatedly told them, they were free.

The Reconstruction years were hard times for the entire South, and this fact was known to many of the darkies. It was Cripple Tony who encouraged Gid to continue with his father's game fowl. "Massa Gid, de war shore hurt a lot, and leab mos folks po, but you is not hurt bad as some. Massa Nick win

lot ob money wid he roosters and folks try to buy he chickens, but Massa Nick neber would sell any ob dem."

Gid listened to Tony and moved all of his father's brood fowl to his home at Hilliardston. He liked game fowl and had learned much from his father about them. He searched through his father's personal effects and found the book his dad had kept on all his game fowl. Nick had carefully described the location of every cock placed on an open, free range walk, and wrote the name of the people living there. Some of these birds were put on walks before the war, and would now be five years old. The book also contained Nick's records of breeding and the mating yards. Gid now kept his distillery fired and running almost full time. His father had only used the "still" in the Spring and Fall, and had never sold any of its products. Gid found his distillery profitable, with apple brandy the best seller. An old ledger which Gid used to record his business transactions; shows that the sale of brandy and whiskey was very good. His apple brandy was called, "Old Nash". This product of Nash county was widely known in the adjoining counties and was praised with high esteem by all who tasted the potent beverage. Gid sometimes made a "run" of sour mash grain liquor or a "run" of rum from black strap molasses. The rum was his cheapest product and a favorite with the darkies.

In 1867 Gid's sister Rebecca, married a Mr. Tom Collins of Nash county. Mr. Collins and his bride joined a group of several families who migrated to mountainous Western North Carolina and settled on Pigeon River in Haywood county. Mr. Collins was a game fowl man and got along well with Gid Arrington, his brother-in-law. Collins and his wife had two sons, Ben and Nick. Nick Collins was named after his grandfather, The Great Nick Arrington.

Gid followed in his father's foot steps, and was very much like Nick. He too was successful in numerous cocking mains, but was never the equal of his illustrious father or fought on such a large scale as Nick. He was a very good breeder and there was a great demand for Arrington fowl which both father and son had fought with success.

The sport of cocking became more popular in the Northern States after the Civil War. Many Yankees had never seen the beautiful birds of unyielding courage until they invaded the South. Here they found that all families of prominence had their own strain of gamecocks. None of the magnificent plantations would be complete without its breed of fighting cocks.

Gid did not advertise his game fowl, for he preferred not to sell. As long as he fought cocks, why should others get his fowl, he thought. But such

invincible fowl are difficult to keep from others, and Gid did not have the money his father had before the Civil War. The price some would offer for his fowl was too tempting to refuse. They came as guests, from all points. Some staying a month at his home, and Gid showed them the same Arrington hospitality as his father would. Some of these guests paid very dearly for a trio of game fowl direct from the son of the famous Nick Arrington. What had been strictly a gentleman's hobby and sport for his father, became for Gid a means to help rebuild what the war had destroyed and taken from him. Gid later regretted that his invincible game fowl was in other hands. At times he probably met his own strain of Cripple Tonys at some of the cocking events in which he participated and fought. Gid requested that each buyer promise never to fight them as Cripple Tonys after they left Arrington hands and none of the breeders who obtained his fowl ever fought them as Cripple Tonys; they were always fought as "Travelers."

This was certainly an appropriate new name for the fowl with which the incomparable Nick Arrington had traveled so far and successfully. Very few of these breeders kept them absolutely pure; each infused a little of their own blood lines by crossing with their best game fowl. However, they were still successful with the Arrington fowl; even with the slight infusion.

Sledge had these fowl known as Travelers, Colonel Jim Rogers of North Carolina had them, Hanna had them, the Shelton Bros. had them, F. E. Montgomery had them, the late Dr. W. C. Caldwell of N. C. bred and fought them with success and there were others who had these game fowl. Game fowl history proves that all of these men did well with these Travelers, which were heavy with the blood of Nick Arrington's game fowl.

John Gideon Arrington prospered in spite of the aftermath of War and Reconstruction. He did not grow large crops of cotton, but each year with the help of the faithful darkies he produced a crop of tobacco which supplemented his income. This crop, with his distillery, his store, his game fowl, his land holdings and his cotton-gins, made him successful until his frail health failed completely. Gid spent the last years of his life in Nash county near Rocky Mt., N. C. where he could get medical attention.

John Gideon Arrington was buried near Rocky Mt., N. C. where he died. Gid's son, Richard Arrington, married and went to Western North Carolina and settled on Pigeon River in Haywood county near his Uncle and Aunt; after his father died. Richard Arrington was also a game fowl man.

Although very old, Nick Arrington's grandsons, Ben and Nick Collins were living in 1953. Both were

well versed in the history of the Arringtons as far back as the 16th century, and were two of the people who gave information which helped make this book. Ben died when 80 years old at Asheville, North Carolina. Nick Collins lived to be 90 years old, and died at Charlotte, North Carolina.

AUTHOR'S NOTE OF CONCLUSION

Perhaps I have not done justice and written enough praise for this splendid God-fearing gentleman who had that rare touch of genius with game fowl, so seldom found. There have been other great cockers in history, but none to compare with Nicholas Williams Arrington.

So, when you behold a proud gamecock of physical perfection, well balanced and proportioned, excellent carriage, station, and conformation; more beautiful than any bird of paradise, and endowed with a spirit and courage that must surely come from Heaven; think also of the men who breed and fight them, for without these men; God's most nearly perfect creation, masterpiece of the living world, with strength and symmetry perfectly conjoined; would soon become extinct.

Today there is little left of Nick Arrington's great plantations and property. At this conclusion, only the ruins of the awe inspiring mansion of The Cedars remain. All furnishings are gone; vandals and thieves have destroyed or stolen everything of value. It has been looted of its marble mantels over the fireplaces, and the fancy iron work of the balcony porches vanished years ago. Both the large front and side porches are now gone and several families of renters or share croppers have occupied the big house since it passed from Arrington owners.

Each family who lived there destroyed or changed some of the originality of the mansion and even the green window blinds with shutters have disappeared. Much of the flooring and walls of the attic have been pried loose by looters hoping to find money or valuables which the wealthy Arringtons may have hidden there. A few years ago two trunks filled with worthless Confederate money were found in the attic. The numerous slave quarters and the large stables and barns are gone. The demand for the beautiful, fragrant, long enduring wood of many uses was too much for the owner several years ago. He cut every Cedar on the place down, including those growing in the pasture; sparing only a few which grew around one of the family burial plots.

Nash county today has many negroes in it who carry the name of their last master, ARRINGTON. The unexcelled, never defeated "Traveling Cocker" died February 23, 1865, but some of the descendants of this aristocratic family still follow the traditional sport and the Arringtons are well known at high class cocking events.

Relatives of Nicholas Williams Arrington are now widely scattered over the U. S. and all of them are successful and prominent citizens in their communities. Most of them are professional people, with vocations which require a good education. Those valiant, fast, and aggressive Travelers seen in our modern cockpits

today, still carry some of the blood of Nick Arrington's fowl, which Nick fought as Cripple Tonys.

This grand gentleman of the fancy who twice won a fabulous fortune from the Dictator of Mexico and who met and defeated many famous cockers of his time for huge amounts, will ever command the respect and awe of sportsmen. The words, "Nick Arrington of North Carolina" will always be like magic and stir the imagination of game fowl fanciers everywhere.

THE IMMORTAL NICK ARRINGTON

BY

GLENN H. TODD

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

After reading this book you will know that only an authority could have written this biography. It ranges from simplicity to brilliancy in words and thought. The uninitiated will be enlightened, and at times they will seem to actually live and experience a part of this man's life.

The author is an authority on game fowl and the sport of cocking. In this narration he has most capably exemplified the ancient and honorable sport, in all of its various phases; as it was in the past, and is today.

It is an unusual book; colorful, interesting and beautiful.

AN ADAMS PRESS BOOK

